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HISTORY
OF
DISSENTERS,
FROM THE
REVOLUTION
IN 1688, TO THE YEAR 1808.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

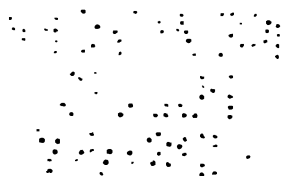
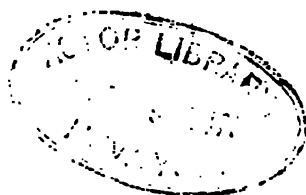
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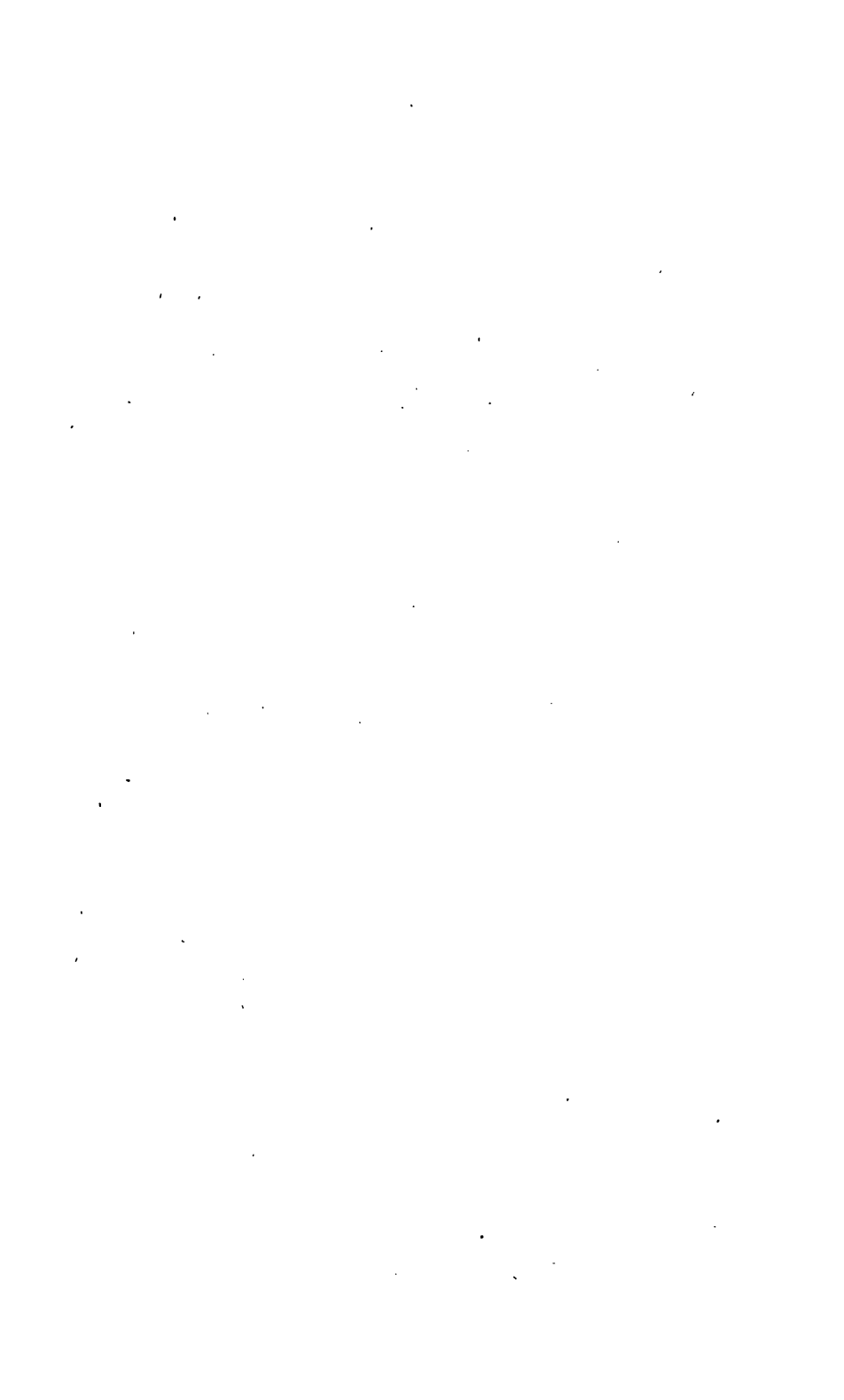
ERRATA.

Page 4, line 7 from the bottom, read "Procrustes."

65, note, read "utter the response."

104, line 9 from top, for "church of England," read "church of Rome."

388, for "chapter III." read "chapter IV."



P R E F A C E.

THAT the interests of religion may be eminently promoted by the records of its history, will be denied by no one who duly reflects that the pen of inspiration was employed to write the annals of the earliest ages of the church. Ecclesiastical history forms a large portion of the Old Testament; and the first years of the Christian church, when it was under the direction of the inspired apostles, are recorded in the sacred history of the Acts. This divine book would be the model, as well as the commencement of the history of Christianity, were it possible for any, who are not endued with the same inspiration, to approach the inimitable grace with which the moral uses are there wrought into the relation of the facts. But as we must not be silent, because we cannot preach like Paul; so neither should we suffer the remembrance of the divine conduct towards the church to die away in oblivion, because we cannot record it with the pen of Luke.

Religion, which elsewhere utters her mind in pre-

cepts, teaches, in ecclesiastical history, with the louder voice of examples and facts. The excellencies of Christian principles and conduct here allure to imitation, by the happy consequences which appear on record, or the errors of former generations in the church make some atonement to us for the mischiefs which they have occasioned, by standing as flaming beacons on a dangerous shore. Since not merely insulated individuals, but the whole body of Christians are, at some seasons, exposed to the danger of acting upon mistaken principles, and pursuing pernicious measures, which unhappily turn the march of religion from an advancing, to a retrograde course; it is infinitely desirable to hold out such warnings as fatal experience may furnish, to save us from renewing the errors and mistakes of those who have gone before us. It is, indeed, a melancholy truth that, though individuals may learn wisdom from the follies of their predecessors, nations buy experience only to throw it away again: but in the church of Christ, where the depraved passions are brought into subjection by divine grace, and a sincere desire to know the path of duty predominates in the heart, the advantage of these instructive records is often inestimably great. As the sacred Scriptures have announced the will of heaven that "the memory of the wicked shall rot," while "the righteous are held in everlasting remembrance," it cannot be less than a duty to consecrate to the

actions or sufferings of pious men those labours of the press, which confer on them a species of immortality upon earth. It is the privilege of sacred history to give a niche in the temple of God to the statues of men, who have devoted their lives to rear that temple to his praise. Thus some of the most striking examples, which the histories of this world would have neglected, as too tame for their stormy scenes, are not only snatched from unmerited oblivion, but called forth to contend against the pestiferous influence of worldly heroes, and to perpetuate the usefulness which was the ambition of their lives, beyond the limits of their earthly race. Hereby a martyred "Abel, being dead, yet speaketh," to warn succeeding generations from emulating the fatal success of a murderous Cain, though dazzling with all the delusive lustre which historians may unhappily contrive to throw around a conqueror.

What Christian, that has read the biographies of holy men, will hesitate to acknowledge, that their animating influence has thrilled through all his soul, and inspired him with the sacred ambition to "go and do likewise?" Who, on rising from the perusal of such works, does not ardently wish that they could be multiplied, that the diversified excellencies of numerous Christians might fan a kindred flame in other breasts? But the example of many an excellent person, though worthy to be held up to imitation,

does not admit the honour of a separate publication ; or, if the partiality of friends should give it this distinction, the smallness of the work exposes it to be at last forgotten, amidst the multitudes of books “ of making which there is no end.” It is the province of ecclesiastical history to collect these scattered leaves, more sacred and more precious than those of the heathen Sibylls, and thus to watch that the names, which the church has inscribed in the book of life, should not again be blotted out.

And even where men are only anxious to be thoroughly informed of the affairs of their country, or of the world, though they may be unhappily indifferent to religion, the history of the church has high claims upon their attention. Yet how many who would blush to be found ignorant of even the more minute occurrences in the political world, deem it no reflection on their education to be almost total strangers to the first leading facts in the history of religion ? But in various important instances these two branches of knowledge are so entwined, that he who is ignorant of the one cannot be well informed of the other. And where the governments of the world have interfered with religion, as they too often have, to its injury and their own, it will generally be found, that those who make religion the element of their existence, view the affair through a different medium from others, and place it in that true light which has escaped the

historians of this world. How strange the difference between the characters or histories of the first Christians, when we see them in the clear light of the New Testament, and in the obscure hints of Pliny or Suetonius ! How much would he suffer in loss of real knowledge who should content himself with what he could learn of Christianity from the historians of the Roman empire !

It is in the ecclesiastical department that history is carried forward to its true and noblest end. For who but children read the historic page, for the mere knowledge of tales and dates ? He whose mind is imbued with the true spirit of history, values it chiefly for the knowledge of man which it conveys, and the lessons of moral and political wisdom which it so forcibly inculcates. And where can these higher objects be more effectually obtained than in those pages which record the sentiments of men on their immortal destiny, develope the passions which their religion or their superstition enkindled, and transmit to posterity the good or evil effects of the various systems of faith which they have adopted ? That which is called history by eminence excels the science of natural history, as far as the rational surpasses the animal or vegetable world ; but ecclesiastical history transcends all other, for it is not only the history of minds, but of minds acting under the impulse of conscious immortality. The irrational creation could afford materials for a

history of births and deaths, of battles and empires; but man alone can furnish the memoirs of religion.

Since writing these remarks we were struck with the coincidence of sentiment contained in the following sentences from a popular work. "This mighty change (the reformation) invites the attention of the philosopher, and of the statesman, almost as strongly as that of the divine. Revolutions in the state of the human mind present more interest, and yield more instruction than those which affect the arrangements of communities and empires, and which are the consequences of organized violence. The revolt from the pope, and the expulsion of Aristotle from the schools are ampler themes for observation and reflection than the falls of kingdoms; and the changes in religious faith and worship, wrought by Zwinglius, Luther, and Calvin, more forcibly attract the cultivated mind than the conquests of Alexander, Timur, or Napoleon: for in this comparison the revolutions effected by the devastators of the globe are coarse and vulgar matters*."

But with all the partialities of Englishmen, which have been largely displayed in the history, what have they written on the religion of our country? Is it to the credit of our regard for Christianity that we have no modern history devoted chiefly to the church of Christ in Britain? It is, therefore, presumed that

* Monthly Review, January, 1806, p. 15.

the introduction to the work which is now presented to the public, though it contains the history of ages before the dissenters existed, will not be thought irrelative or uninteresting. It seemed desirable thus to introduce the dissenters to our reader's acquaintance, that we might not appear to write the history of a people dropped from the clouds. By this means also our volumes will form a compendious history of religion in Britain, as we have devoted, under each of the periods into which our work is divided, a distinct chapter to the state of religion in the British empire at large. The former half of our introductory pages contain the records of Christianity, from its first promulgation in Britain, to the reformation : but though the ages are many, the facts are few ; and the space, though wide, contains so little religion, that it may be compressed in a small compass. The period which elapsed from the reformation to the revolution is shorter but more interesting and important ; and to this we have devoted the latter half of the introduction.

To the history of the dissenters, which is strictly our province, Neale's history of the puritans may be considered as the precursor. During the stormy period which he has recorded, the non-conformists maintained a doubtful contest, whether they should be comprehended within the bosom of the establishment, be tolerated as a distinct communion, or anni-

hiliated by the omnipotence of oppression. The contest had but just been decided, when Neale took up the pen; and though the dissenters were legally acknowledged, the angry passions of the combatants had not subsided, nor could it then be ascertained what would be the effect of the toleration, either on the dissenters themselves, or the community in general. That intellectual distance, which is essential to a just view of the objects, was then wanting. A hundred and twenty years have since elapsed to prove the tendency of the principles of dissent; and several generations have passed away, whose religious history we now attempt to snatch from threatened oblivion.

Nor should that part of our history, which relates exclusively to the dissenters, be considered as of minor importance, merely because it concerns only a minority in religion. When such a history is written with a faithful and catholic spirit, none but a sectarian mind will deny its worth. Particular, has this advantage over general, history, that it forms a kind of concentrated extract, of which the qualities, however potent and valuable, would, when diffused over a larger mass, become vapid and useless. For want of this peculiar species of information, persons otherwise well-informed have exposed themselves to the severe censure of the inspired preacher, who said, "he that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame to him." A modern historian, whose

peculiar connexions should have preserved him from this disgrace, has, with equal vehemence and ignorance, pronounced his censure on the two thousand non-conformists, for the frivolous reasons which induced them to make the most costly sacrifices. But they had more grand and weighty motives than this their censor was aware. Those who dissent from an established religion are frequently found to be better informed of its principles and history than those from whom they differ are of their reasons for separation. But by mutual acquaintance men cease to stare at each other as barbarians; and learn, with pleasing surprise, that their Creator has others who closely study his will, and devoutly seek his honour, besides those who bow at the same altars with themselves.

The history of a people who, after various fortunes, acquired a legal charter for their religious rights, which they have now maintained through several generations, distinct from the splendid establishment of their country, unrelaxed by the sun-shine of prosperity, as they were unbroken by the storms of adversity, will appear to the reflecting mind an object of deep and lively interest. The whole globe furnishes nothing exactly parallel. The protestants of France were not merely a religious dissent. They formed a political body, under the patronage of the nobles, and the princes of the royal blood, defended by an army, and entrusted with garrison towns. But

they were shortly overwhelmed with a destruction which was almost complete. The establishment of Holland could never vie with the splendor and power of the English hierarchy; nor have the Dutch dissenters equal claims to distinctions with those whose history we write. In America we behold multitudes of the same religious communions as the English dissenters, and sharing in their prosperity, but without having to counteract the overbearing influence of a powerful and wealthy establishment.

While the dissenters are an *unique* in the history of the church and the world, they have another claim to special consideration. From them sprang the first asserters of the right of religious liberty. Those who have differed from the dominant religion have usually contended for the right of worship according to their own views; but it was on the assumed ground of their being right, and others wrong, which inspired the wish, if not the attempt, to establish themselves to the exclusion of others. But when power was in the hands of the dissenters, then they promulgated the doctrine, that conscience was free from all authority but that of God; that Christ's kingdom is not of this world; that those who offend not against the peace of civil society have a right to form themselves into churches for public social worship, which the state should neither establish nor oppress, but protect. This has furnished the infidel historian of

England with a pretty philosophising antithesis, that “from the bosom of the most furious fanaticism sprung the most enlightened, liberal, and sublime sentiment.” But under the varnish of this glittering sentence, he ill conceals a culpable ignorance, or intentional misrepresentation. Hume knew little more in reality of the puritans, whom he honours with his abuse, than of the first Christians, for whom he affected the same contempt; and if called to substantiate his charge, he might have found it as difficult to bring proofs of the connexion between dissent and fanaticism, as between Christianity and imposture.

While our history so forcibly demands universal attention, to dissenters themselves it can need no recommendation. The records of a hundred and twenty years quiet enjoyment of the privileges, for which your forefathers laboured, struggled, suffered, bled, and died, cannot fail deeply to interest those who inherit their principles. You here perceive that the first founders of the dissent did not throw away their lives for a thing of nought, the chimera of a heated brain. Though one of the prelates told Mr. Howe that the dissent was *res unius ætatis*, the thing of a day; that when he and Dr. Bates, and a few more, were dead, the separation would cease; our history records the fulfilment of Mr. Howe’s prophetic reply, that the dissenting churches were built upon principles which would ensure their perpetuity.

Here dissenters may judge of the value of their principles by the nature, measure, and durability of the fruit. The author of the church history of Britain says, next to the study of the Scriptures, history best becometh a gentleman; church history a Christian; the British history an Englishman; to which we may add, the dissenting history a dissenter.

There are many reasons why the history which we present to the public should be written by dissenters. They may be more partial, but they will certainly be better informed. Those who have not taken their station with dissenters may have their prejudices, either for or against them, and they are invariably found to be ignorant of the more minute features and delicate lines, which are essential to a faithful portrait. But if dissenters even indulge the partialities of which they may perhaps be suspected, they will then, though unintentionally, betray, by the tinge which their minds have received, the distinguishing colour of the communion to which they belong.

It has, however, been our aim to weigh men and actions on both sides in the balances of the sanctuary, and to poise them with a steady, impartial hand. As we have no intention, so we can have no interest, to flatter or deceive. Our faith as dissenters is dictated by no human authority; "we have not sworn, as some others, to be always of our present opinion*;" nor are

* Introduction, p. 73.

we bound to adhere to any standard of imaginary perfection, which forbids us to profit by the increasing lights of years, or to be wiser than our forefathers. On the contrary, it is our happiness to know that the faults which we detect in the dissenters we may publish, with the encouraging hope that our fidelity may profit our friends, and render them less exposed to the reflections of their enemies.

We have, indeed, undertaken our work from attachment to the subject, as well as from conviction that it was an important desideratum in British and Christian literature. We have, therefore, sought to animate our pages with the emotions of our hearts, as well as the sentiments of our minds; not affecting a philosophic indifference, where it would have appeared to us to argue, not mental dignity, but a moral torpor. Conceiving the cause of the dissenters to be good, we wished the world to know their character and history: esteeming their principles pure and salutary, we judged it the labour of benevolence to give them all possible publicity and diffusion. For it was the religious uses which we hoped to promote by our work, which could alone justify us to our consciences for employing in it a portion of the life consecrated to the service of the Gospel. "Either (as the Roman historian observes) a fondness for the task we have undertaken has deceived us, or there scarcely ever

was a history richer in profitable examples." For these reasons we have availed ourselves of the license, which ecclesiastical history, more than any other, affords, to enlarge upon the nature and effects of the principles which produced the occurrences recorded in our work. The histories of this world have a thousand sources of interest. The revolutions of empires, the succession of princes, the details of battles, the deaths of heroes, the struggles of parties, the formation of treaties, the regulations of commerce, and even the various phenomena of the natural world, so crowd their pages as to leave less room for reflection and sentiment, which yet are allowed to form the salt of history. But Christ says, "my kingdom is not of this world; if it were, then would my servants fight." His church is called Jerusalem, the vision of peace, and the calm tenour of its affairs presents few occurrences visible to the eye of sense. But "the weapons of its warfare, though not carnal, are mighty, through God, to pull down strong holds" of sin: its principles strike deep, and its revolutions, whether successful or disastrous, though unattractive to the sons of earth, are, to the eye of heaven, infinitely more momentous than the convulsions of all the empires of the globe; since they will affect the felicities of man in the ages of eternity, when the globe itself shall have been consigned to the flames. But as principles and tempers form the imperishable essence of religion,

so they demanded peculiar attention in a history of dissent, which is founded solely upon principles, and stands unsupported by secular policy or power. Yet while we have departed widely from the unprofitable sterility of Mosheim, who has given the history of any thing but religion, we have studied to pursue the course of affairs more regularly than comported with the plan of the keen instructive Campbell, or the pleasant philosophic Jortin.

The nature and importance of religious principles will peculiarly appear in the account which we have given of the state of religion in each period, whether among dissenters, or those who embrace the religion of the state. For, according to men's views of truth and piety, they will estimate the degree of either in any age of the world. The pride of the human heart, and the partialities of Englishmen, may sometimes kindle into indignation, when we point to the handwriting on the wall, the divine sentence on Britain: "Tekel, thou art weighed in the balances, and found wanting." But our sentence, if not grateful, will, we hope, be found impartial. We are not so dazzled with the lustre of our communion, as to think all darkness when we turn our eyes to any other quarter. Believing that there is but one standard of faith and holiness, by which all will, at last, be tried, we have endeavoured to record the aberrations of dissenters,

This conduct we are aware will disappoint and displease many, who, preferring flattery to truth, would have wished us to hold up such a mirror as would make every face look fair. But while it had been easy to have paid compliments to all parties, and exposed the sins of none, where would have been the profit? Should we not have been guilty of contributing to curse our friends with the perpetuation of their faults? Was it not far preferable to seek their perfection, by detecting their weaknesses, or errors, though at the hazard of their frowns? For we are not so ignorant of mankind as to expect to escape censure, which we have so freely bestowed. Such is the imbecility of human nature, that we often fancy we diminish our own fault, and revenge ourselves for the offensive reproof, by retorting upon our accusers. We should, therefore, think ourselves but ill qualified for the work which we have undertaken; if we were so feeble, or so irritable, as to be unable to endure the breath of contradiction, or the blows of revenge. If we have erred, we shall be happy to receive correction: but if we have only told unwelcome truths, we shall neither retract, nor repent. The angry expression of sore feelings will only encourage us to hope, that for the wound which we have probed to the bottom, men will be induced to seek a cure; and if we are blamed by all parties we shall rejoice, that we have been partial to none.

There are, however, too many who seem to imagine, that censures on the conduct of an individual, are reflections on the whole body to which he belongs. This we cannot admit. No communion can be responsible for the behaviour of every one within its pale. In proportion as any denomination of Christians becomes more numerous and reputable, it is more exposed to the intrusion of hypocrites, or self-deceivers. But we are only dishonoured by the fault, and implicated in its guilt, when, from morbid tenderness for our own credit, we attempt to justify the crime of an offending brother, and repel the censures levelled at him as if aimed at ourselves. The historian acts the part of a friend when he strongly marks the distinction between the guilty individual, and the meritorious body; and they adopt the most effectual illustration when they deliver up the offender to the chastisement which he has deserved.

An equally mistaken sensibility leads others to conclude, that he who censures the spirit or conduct which prevailed among any body of men a century or two ago, pronounces a sentence of reprobation on them now. But the study of history presents to us many painful, and some pleasing proofs, that communities are as liable to change of character as the individuals of which they are composed. The complaint which Jehovah originally addressed to Israel, "I planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right

seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine*?" may be repeated to many Christian churches. While, on the other hand, communions which, in their infancy, betrayed a disgraceful excess of puerile folly, and depraved temper, have grown out of their faults, and ripened in wisdom and holiness as in years; till, in the end, their early vices are contrasted if not expiated by the opposite virtues. But the faithful historian who most sincerely venerates their present character, will deem it his duty to record their original deformities. Yet, on these and other accounts, we may probably give offence by our reflections upon the conduct of the establishment towards dissenters. We have not hesitated to brand tyrannical measures with the infamy which they deserve; and unhappily too many of these occur in the course of our work, which loudly call for that retributive justice which impartial history should award. Yet we are far from thinking, either that every member of the established religion was transported with the furious lust of domination, which her rulers have, in former times, displayed; or that none of her clergy have, since then, received any improvement from the lapse of time, and the discipline of events. On the contrary, we have the happiness to be acquainted with clergymen whose enlightened minds, liberal principles, virtuous lives,

* Jeremiah ii. 21.

and benevolent labours, would do honour to any communion of Christians which now exists, and would have reflected no disgrace on the first and purest churches of Christ on earth. There are those who minister in the church from which we dissent, whose generous hearts echo to the severest sentence we could pronounce on the arbitrary measures which drove the puritans from the established pale.

The beneficed clergyman who wrote "the plea for the non-conformists" breathes a noble indignation at the conduct of those who ruled within his own communion, and the tenderest sympathy with those who suffered for their dissent. He bore honourable testimony to their worth, and declares his full conviction of the truth contained in judge Hale's remark, "that the bishops, in silencing so many excellent preachers, when there were none to supply their places, had punished, not so much the ministers as the flocks who were deprived of such pastors." The liberality also of Jortin, which ever employs his characteristic good sense to generous purposes, observes, when the emperor Honorius revoked an edict for indulgence to dissenters, "thus we see that all attempts towards religious toleration were always opposed and suppressed." Of the dissenters he says, let us do justice to the theological merits and useful labours of persons of another denomination in our country, of whom we may say, *qui tales sunt utinam essent nostri*.

The author of the Confessional maintains, that Pierce, the vindicator of the dissenters, has proved the bishops had no right to punish the puritans as they did, for refusing subscription to their canons and authority. He humourously observes, that the puritans might have said to Elizabeth, as the Israelites to Pharaoh, "Behold thy servants are beaten, but the fault is in thine own people."

We cannot deny ourselves the gratification of quoting the liberal sentiments of another of the established clergy, who, speaking of the church, at whose altars he officiates, says, "if I saw her actuated by a narrow and ferocious spirit, mounted on a sanguinary tribunal to suppress opinion with overwhelming punishment, I would renounce her with indignation, and throwing her disgraceful favours at her feet, I would retire beyond her corruption, and her vengeance to some uncivilized region, where I might vindicate the name of Jesus from its impious profanation, and shew him to be the author of blessings, and not of misery to man*.

But the devout and liberal minds among the established clergy have, alas, too frequently been thrown into a mortifying minority, both of numbers and of influence; so that all which appeared in the national religion, during some of the periods which pass under our review, was profaneness at the altar of God, and fierce

* Life of Milton, by Charles Symmonds, D. D. p. 177.

bloody persecution in the temple of redeeming love. As, however, the lust of domination over conscience is not confined to one communion of Christians, though in a state establishment it has more scope for its exercise, but is the universal consequence of the pride and selfishness of the human heart; we have had occasion to hold up to infamy this hell-begotten temper among different denominations who profess the Christian faith. If, on these occasions, we have uttered the language of empassioned abhorrence, we deem it a sufficient apology to say, that by persecution for conscience sake, the highest honours of God, our Saviour, are invaded, and the dearest interests of the human race endangered.

As the dissenters rose into existence at a period, when the constitution, which is the glory of our country, was not yet formed, it is our province to glance at the struggles against arbitrary power, which terminated favourably for the liberties of Englishmen, in the glorious revolution of the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-eight. But this necessarily involves in it the censure of kings. The characteristic pride and bigotry of the Stewarts offended by the presumption of subjects, who dared to think themselves qualified to choose for themselves a religion, which they judged better than that of their sovereign, gave rise to measures of oppression and persecution, which, as advocates for the rights of

conscience, and the liberty of religion, we could not but condemn. From the rise of the puritans to the reign of William, it is our painful duty to record a succession of princes who were unwise enough to suffer some of the jewels to be torn from their diadem, that others might shine with unrivalled lustre : thus, by sacrificing a part of their subjects to the bigotry of the rest, they threw away the glory of being the common parents of the whole. This has left us few opportunities of paying the tribute of applause to the memory of departed royalty. But let it be remembered, that the princes on whom our censure falls, are those from whom our forefathers conquered their liberties, and our present constitution. Those who are recorded by the civil historian in the black catalogue of tyrants, hostile to the rights of Britons, appear in our pages on the crimson list of persecutors of the saints. The unhappy monarch who ordered Jeffries' last campaign against the dissenters, is the same over whom our nation annually exults, when the established church chaunts the liturgy for the festival of the glorious revolution. As was observed concerning the fall of the first Charles, the oppressor of the puritans, it may be said that our nation, each fifth of November, exults over the second James, in the sublime language of the inspired prophet. " How hath the oppressor ceased ! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the

rulers. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, thou that didst weaken the nations. For thou hast said in thy heart I will ascend into heaven (to rule in the church), I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most high (to give law to conscience); yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, "is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that made the world as a wilderness, that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the land, even all of them, lie in glory, in Westminster, the cemetery of kings, every one in his own house or sepulchre. But thou art cast out of thy grave, like an abominable branch, as a carcase trodden under feet, thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, but die in a foreign land, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evil doers shall never be renowned *."

By those who deem servility the only loyalty, who can see no difference between the throne of the house of Hanover, founded on the free choice of the people, and that of the Stewarts, built on the dark cloud of a pretended divine right, our animadversions on the exiled family may, perhaps, be perversely interpreted; as concealing a hostile mind towards the princes who

* Isaiah xiv. 4—20.

have ever proved themselves the guardians of the toleration act, which is the magna charta of dissenters. If ignorance so stupid, or suspicions so malevolent, deserved a reply, we should say

—— *Utinamque oculos in pectora posses*

Inserere et patrias intus deprendere curas.

But when the British constitution was established, by the enlightened and magnanimous policy of William the great, a new scene opened, and, in the princes of a free state, the dissenters hailed their faithful patrons, the guardians of their sacred liberties, and the objects of their grateful attachment. It will then be evident that, while we scorn to applaud the mandate, “ which says to our soul, bow down that we may go over it,” while we know not how to lick the iron hoof which would tread our religion in the dust, we can gratefully appreciate the liberality of a patriot prince, who may be attached to a different communion, and honour the memory of those who secure to their subjects the undisturbed enjoyment of their religious rights.

We anticipate another source of objections. It is not improbable that some of our readers may be disappointed in not meeting with minute occurrences of local interest, the records of a particular church, or the name of a favourite minister, in our work. But though we are apt to attach excessive importance to that of which we ourselves form a part, and Christians

may, from amiable causes, esteem a certain minister above all others in the world, history takes a more comprehensive glance, and reduces persons and events to their true proportions. It was our province to inquire, what influence each circumstance, or individual, had upon the affairs of the whole body, and to choose, amidst a multiplicity of objects, those which had the fairest claim to make a prominent figure in the work. Hence we were compelled, though reluctantly, to omit many names which our partialities would have recorded with honour. At the first and the last of the periods, into which our history is divided, we were called to make the most frequent sacrifices to historic propriety. Among the two thousand ministers ejected by the act of uniformity, there are many names dear to learning, to religion, and the dissent, whose eventful lives and apostolic labours would have furnished many an instructive page. But those of them who died before the revolution, did not belong to our history; and though we might have claimed the right of making the fullest use of the memoirs of such as departed after that period, we did not choose to appear to multiply books to no purpose, by merely transcribing that noble list of confessors contained in the Non-conformist's Memorial. We have, however, for particular reasons given biographical sketches of four or five ministers, whose names are recorded in that useful work.

In our last period, which comes down to the present day, many names occur of persons who have but recently retired to their reward, whose memories still breathe a fresh and sacred fragrance over the immediate scene of their usefulness, and for whom our own personal friendships have solicited an honourable memorial. But they were so numerous that all could not be mentioned, at least without making our biographical department a meagre list of barren names and dates. The design, however, of the chapter which we have devoted, under each period, to the memory of eminent persons, was not merely to gratify vanity, or soothe the affections of surviving relatives and friends. We considered the biography of history as its most useful branch. Here we not only become acquainted with the venerable dead, as in particular biographies, but we converse with them at their own æra, compare them with their surrounding contemporaries, and judge of the degree of their worth and importance by the impulse they have given to the passing events. The extent to which it was necessary to enlarge on each individual, in order to render the notice of his life beneficial to our readers, has excluded other names which might seem to demand a place. We stand justified to ourselves, as we trust we shall to our reflecting readers, by choosing rather to promote their improvement than gratify their expectations. We wished to present a picture of each

departed Christian whom we have noticed, sufficiently large and distinct to render him known to survivors, to give prominence to his excellencies, and excite such emulation that the world may never see the last of its benefactors.

As we deem the diffusion of sentiments by the active agency of the press, an affair of the highest importance to the interests of truth and holiness, we should not dare to write in any other way than that for which we should be willing to give an account “to God the judge of all.” In view of his tribunal we have given our narration of facts, published our statement of principles, and uttered the emotions of our hearts. For, while this serious impression has guarded us from wilful misrepresentation, it has not extinguished our hatred of tyranny and persecution, though it has induced us to cultivate benevolence for mankind, amidst our abhorrence of their crimes. Should the degree of hilarity in which we may sometimes indulge, seem to discredit this solemn protestation, we plead that the seriousness of religion, which loathes the mad laughter of the profane, most perfectly accords with the smile of the cheerful. If, at any time, we invoke irony in aid of truth, we defend ourselves by the example of a prophet and an apostle: the former gravely bids the stupid devotees of Baal “cry aloud, saying, perhaps he is on a journey, or asleep and needs to be waked;” the latter chastises

the vanity of the Corinthians by saying, "ye have reigned as kings without us."

Nor is this without the highest reason; for while the principles which appeal to our judgment deserve to be tried by sober argument, the knots with which the pride of priestly domination would tie up our reason, or the spirit of superstition fetter our conscience, will often be most successfully cut with the keen edge of ridicule.

Ridiculum acri

Fortius et melius magnas plerumque secat res.

With regard to the authorities whence we derived the materials for our history, it had been easy to have swelled our references far beyond their present number, had we inserted them for ostentation and not for use. We have, however, appealed to our authors, whenever the nature or importance of the facts seemed to require such evidence. Beyond this it is a needless waste of paper to occupy the foot of each page with titles and figures, referring to books which not one in a hundred may possess, and not one in a thousand would consult.

HISTORY OF DISSENTERS.

INTRODUCTION.

CONTAINING A SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN TO THE REVOLUTION.

Section I. *From the Introduction of the Gospel to the Reformation.*

WHILE Britons are employed in benevolent missions to evangelise the most distant nations, it is highly interesting to enquire at what period, and by whose labours, we ourselves first received the Gospel of Christ. The task however is difficult, and leads to no satisfactory decision; for as the Nile, which conveys fertility to the fields of Egypt, hides its source in obscurity, so the religion of Britain has diffused inestimable blessings to other lands, but its introduction to our own isle is enveloped in the impenetrable clouds of a remote antiquity.

We discover, indeed, with melancholy precision, the gloomy horrors of the long night in which our ancestors wandered, before the beams of divine Revelation darted upon us from the east; and could we stay to draw a full picture of the gross ignorance, the gloomy superstitions, the disgusting vices, and accumulated miseries which then reigned in Britain, it might at once raise a

blush for our humiliating origin, and enflame our gratitude to him, who brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel. The naked bodies, and savage exterior, of the ancient Britons, which Roman historians have described, were less disgraceful than the besotted minds, and depraved hearts, which lurked within. Were we to give full credit to the concise narrative of Cæsar, we should believe that our forefathers practised a singular species of polygamy, or community of wives, elevated but little above the promiscuous intercourse of brutes. The rude lords exercised over their women and children an absolute power of life and death. Prisoners taken in war, or condemned criminals, they enclosed in wicker cages, and burnt alive as sacrifices to their gods, or at the funerals of the deceased, to appease their departed spirits. Britain is said to have been the chief seat of the Druids, who taught the warlike inhabitants to despise death, from the persuasion that their souls would then pass into other bodies: these dark mysteries were, from our isle, propagated among the Gauls*. But enough of a scene where the thick darkness is only interrupted by the gleam of infernal fires, which just serves to make it visible.

On turning to enquire who brought the light of the Gospel into this realm of night, we are reminded of him that said, "who opened my eyes I know not; one thing I know; whereas I was blind, now I see†." Has infinite wisdom seen fit to throw a veil of impenetrable darkness over the first introduction of the Gospel into many countries, that we might learn to adore not the hand that brings, but him that sends the blessing? That the benign religion of Jesus was

* Cæsar de bello gallico, lib. I.

† John ix. 25.

introduced into Britain at a very early period, when nations nearer to Judea had not yet heard the joyful sound, seems probable; but that the thirty-seventh year of Tiberius, or the fourth after the death of Christ, was, as some affirm, the auspicious æra, we will not venture to maintain, for it is not credible. When the ancient ecclesiastical historians observe, that Christ walking on the waters was a type and pledge of his hastening to our isle; and that his disciples' occupation of fishermen was designed to facilitate the event, we are amused, but not instructed. Yet we remember that the sublime prophet represents Messiah as saying, ages before his incarnation, "listen, O isles, and hearken, ye people from afar*." To Peter, James, and Paul, among the twelve; to Simon Zelotes and Aristobulus, apostolic men, has been given the title of apostle to the British isle, with equal strength of confidence and want of proof†. But the monkish legends assign this honour to Joseph of Arimathea, who was long supposed to have founded the church at Glastonbury, and planted its holy thorn. It is, however, more lately affirmed, that Caractacus, being conquered by the Romans, and carried captive to Rome, with his father Bran, or Branus, his wife and children, had there an opportunity of hearing the Gospel. Bran and others of the family became converts to the Christian faith, and on their return, introduced it into their native country. On this account Bran is called one of the three blessed sovereigns of Britain, and Cyllin, son of Caractacus, who is supposed to have received the Gospel at this time, is styled St. Cyllin. Eigen, the daughter of Caractacus

* Isaiah xlix. 1.

† Fuller's Church History of Britain, book I.

is recorded as the first British female saint. This noble family is said to have returned from Rome in the seventieth year of the Christian æra, and to have brought over Ilid, a Christian Jew, and Cyndav, a brother, to assist in propagating the Gospel in Britain *.

We still, however, leave this question in the uncertainty in which it is likely always to remain; for whoever was the first herald of mercy to this isle, probably came without pomp or noise; and having scattered the first seeds of divine truth, left them to be watered with the dew of heaven, and departed to find his name in a nobler volume than that of fame, "the Lamb's book of life." But why should every thing be ascribed to the efforts of one individual? Might not the intercourse maintained between this country and Gaul, by means of the travelling merchants, have brought hither Christians at different periods, who might contribute to diffuse the Gospel in various parts of our isle? Wonders are related of the numbers and dignity of the first Christian converts. The Claudia, mentioned by Paul†, is said to have been a British Christian, wife to Pudens, a Roman senator: but this, if it were true, proves nothing concerning the history of religion in Britain, as she might have believed on Christ by hearing his Gospel at Rome.

The second century of the Christian æra furnishes no materials for the religious history of our country; except the supposed conversion of Lucius, a British king, be thought worthy of attention. But his king-

* This is asserted on the authority of the Welsh Triada.

† 2 Tim. iv. 21.

ship, if not imaginary, was very diminutive, amounting to little more than a provincial government under the Romans. His conversion is said to have been effected by the lustre of miracles, and by means of an embassy from Rome; both which render it suspicious*. And though it is triumphantly asserted, that the example of this royal convert was so effectual, that, in a little time, not an unbeliever remained†, we know what kind of converts they are that are caught by shoals in a day. Real Christians are comparatively few, and won with difficulty; but they are “the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold,” and when their hearts are once united to the Saviour, neither time nor death shall dissolve the bond.

The subsequent age commenced auspiciously; for Christians had now filled the Roman empire, being found in all the cities, villages, and camps. Tertullian and Origen glory that places in Britain, which, separated from the world, had been inaccessible to the Roman arms, yielded to the triumphant banner of the cross. Several of the Roman emperors were either liberal enough to leave the Christians, to what they thought, their obstinate humour, or too much absorbed in their pleasures, to find leisure to persecute a despised sect. At other times, when persecution raged furiously in Gaul, our sequestered isle was the asylum of religious liberty. Such may it ever prove! Diocletian boasted of having blotted out the Christian name; but Gildas, our most ancient historian, only says, “in that bloody time, Christianity *almost* disap-

* Spanheim.

† Ita ut in brevi nullus infidelis remaneret.

BEDF.

peared in *some* parts;" and we shall shortly see, that, after this desolating period, there were many in Britain who bore the Christian name. At this time, the Gospel is supposed to have been first introduced into Scotland, or Ireland; and king Donald to have been converted. Now, also, the Popish legends tell us, St. Ursula and eleven thousand virgins were martyred for the Gospel. But St. Alban is called our proto-martyr. His kindness in sheltering a Christian preacher from the fury of persecution, by giving him an asylum in his house at Verulam, a Roman colony, was rewarded by his conversion to the faith of Christ. He sealed his profession with his blood, and the earliest historians of the event, among other miraculous circumstances with which they embellish the story, affirm that the eyes of the executioner dropped from his head, while giving the fatal blow. The town was afterwards called St. Alban's, in honour of this martyr*.

Though the persecution which raged in Britain was short; heavy complaints are made of the places of worship being demolished, the sacred Scriptures burned, and the ministers of religion forced to hide themselves from the storm. But toleration was soon restored, and Constantius, the father of Constantine the great, though induced to execute the Imperial decree for persecution, seems to have reigned in Britain with gentle sway. It is related that he tried the fidelity of his officers to their principles, by commanding them all to sacrifice to the heathen gods, when those, who obeyed against their conscience, were dismissed with ignominy, as men who, false to

* Spanheim.

† Fuller.

their God, could not be supposed faithful to their prince.

Helena, the wife of Constantius, is renowned as an eminent saint; but not till after her departure from Britain, and the supposed conversion of her son. Our country has been pronounced happy beyond all others, in giving birth to Constantine, the first Christian emperor. It is not, however, pretended that he became a believer during his residence in Britain. Having hastened to York, to receive the injunctions of his dying father, he was there invested with the imperial purple, and shortly after marched to Rome, to meet Maxentius, who opposed his elevation. On the eve of the decisive battle, he is said to have seen in the heavens the figure of a cross, with the inscription, "by this conquer." But in the edict which he shortly after published, in favour of the Christians, he not only makes no acknowledgment of being converted by such a miraculous sign, and the subsequent victory which he obtained, but he even avoids any declaration of his own religion, giving only complete liberty of worship. Indeed, after all that has been said on both sides, it still remains an awful doubt, whether Constantine ever possessed any other than a political religion. In the latter part of his reign, while his own conduct was stained with crimes, he more completely established the Christian religion, and loaded its professed friends and ministers with worldly honours. Some have been enraptured with this civil establishment of Christianity, as a most auspicious fulfilment of the prophetic vision: "I saw the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband." But others, seeing the church from that day amalga-

mated with the world, have thought it was rather the opening of the bottomless pit, whence issued smoke and darkness, which defiled and obscured the genuine glories of the Redeemer's kingdom. By this event, however, the British churches enjoyed profound peace, during the former half of the fourth century, but, afterwards, the bloody contests which agitated the country, must have been hostile to the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. *Britain is also charged with a portion of the Arianism, which, at this æra, generally infected the empire.

But in the fifth century, our isle produced other tares. The famous heresiarch Pelagius seems to have been a Welchman, called Morgan: both these names are of the same signification, and import one of maritime birth or residence. His favourite disciple, who was most zealous in support of the heresy, was Celestius, a Scotchman. These two, who were equally celebrated for talents and industry, adopted sentiments which somewhat resembled the system afterwards called Arminianism. They maintained that death was not in consequence of sin, but by an original law of our creation; that the sin of Adam affected himself only, and of course there was no original sin, nor human depravity; that the grace, or favour, of God, was given according to human deserts; and that our free-will, not divine influence, is the source of virtue*. To wipe off from us the odium of this heresy, it has been observed, that the prophet, without honour in his own country, was compelled to travel, in order to disseminate his flattering errors. In Africa he was opposed by the re-

* Spanheim Introd. ad Hist. vol. I. p. 479.

nowned Augustine, by whose means his sentiments were condemned*. At St. Albans a synod was held to suppress this heresy, which had been propagated widely by Agricola. The ecclesiastical historians relate, with much exultation, the event of this polemic conference; and as it is said that the orthodox appealed to the Scripture, if they handled their weapons with any skill the victory was sure†. The hydra, though apparently crushed, put forth new heads, so that Germanus and Lupus, two French preachers, were sent over to extinguish Pelagianism. They are represented as the field and village preachers of their day ‡, for it was not then deemed disgraceful to obey the Redeemer's injunction to "go out into the highways and hedges." Dubricius and Illutus are renowned in this age as eminent teachers of youth, whose schools may be considered as the first Christian universities in Britain.

But as the century advanced, the moral hemisphere was darkened. Vortigern, a British king, having been guilty of an incestuous connexion with his own daughter, a synod was called, in which his crime was condemned. The same prince, who is painted as a horrible monster of wickedness, harassed by the perpetual inroads of the Scots and Picts, adopted the desperate resolution of calling to his aid the Pagan Saxons. They soon became masters, and completed the ruin both of the church and state. Our countrymen at this period are called the ink of the age. They were indeed black with consummate wickedness, from which no class was exempt; but even the clergy were ring-

* Spanheim *Introd. ad Hist.* vol. I. p. 481.

† Fuller, book I. p. 30.

‡ *Per trivium et rura et devia.*

‡ Spanheim 456, et Mosheim 176.

leaders in drunkenness, and all manner of debauchery. Palladius, who seems to have been sent from Celestine, bishop of Rome, both to Scotland and Ireland, dying after an unsuccessful mission, the renowned St. Patrick was deputed to convert the Irish. Having laboured with great success, and founded the see of Armagh, he died in four hundred and thirteen, at the great age of one hundred and twenty, and was honoured as the apostle of Ireland*.

The Saxons, who now reigned, are represented as fierce persecutors of religion; not because the Britons were Christians, but because the Christians were Britons. After a long and destructive conflict, that degree of civilization which we had received from Rome, and the wretched pittance of religion, which still survived amidst the superstition and vices of the times, retired with the vanquished Britons into Wales†. The renowned Arthur is said to have wrought wonders of valour, and his uncle St. David miracles of sanctity. We may hope that St. Asaph, who was at the head of the famous seminary at Bangor, laboured diligently in word and doctrine, for he is celebrated for an excellent saying, "they who oppose the preaching of God's word, envy the salvation of mankind‡."

The close of this century is rendered memorable by the following event. The Anglo-Saxons, who had supplanted the aboriginal Britons, received missionaries from Rome. Ethelbert, king of Kent, the most powerful of the Saxon monarchs, was already prepared to receive the mission by means of his wife

* Spanheim 456, and Mosheim 176.

† Fuller, b. I. p. 40.

‡ Fuller Ch. Hist. of Brit. book I. p. 42.

Bertha, a daughter of the king of France, renowned for her beauty and Christian piety. The circumstance which led to the conversion of the nation, exactly suited the punning style of our church historian, Fuller. Some children from our isle, were exposed for sale as slaves, in the public market at Rome, when Gregory, who was afterwards pope, happened to be present: he asked of what country they were, and was told they were Angles; to which he replied, "they have the countenances of angels." "Of what province are they?" "From Deira," now Durham. "They must be delivered *dei ira*;" which in Latin signifies, from the wrath of God, to which, in the opinion of Gregory, all Pagans were exposed. "Their king's name is Alla," said the master; "and they shall be taught to sing Allelujah," replied the Christian minister*. When Gregory was promoted to the see of Rome, he sent Austin and forty benedictine monks, who after some delays landed in the isle of Thanet, in Kent. The lordly missionary came in Papal style, displaying the weapons of his holy warfare, elevating a silver cross, and a tablet which contained a picture of Jesus; while the sacred chaunt of the litany solicited the ears, to aid the fascination of the eye. Ethelbert, who had been half converted by his beautiful wife, submitted to baptism; and who can wonder that his courtiers and subjects followed? Thus the kingdom of Kent, not the whole island, became Roman Catholic, rather than Christian: for unhappily the mission of Austin, wears an aspect very different from those of the apostles†. But the ancient Britons in

* Fuller, b. II. p. 52, Mosheim and Spanheim.

† In answer to many superstitious queries from Austin, Gregory advises him to leave the Pagans in possession of their beloved *feasts*, provided their names were changed, and instead of slaying

Cornwall, and in Wales, as well as the Scots and the Picts in the north, still preserved the less modish, but more pure religion of their ancestors. With them the real Christianity of that generation took up its abode.

At the close of this century, died St. Columba, who, in the language of the country was called Colum Cille, or Colum of the cells, from the hundred monasteries which he founded. He was the apostle of the Highlands of Scotland, and founder of the famous monastery of Iona, one of the Hebrides, of which he was the first abbot*.

the victims in honour of devils, as he calls the Pagan deities, they feasted upon them to the praise of some Christian saint. Thus the conversion of the Saxons appears a mere change of names,

* He was descended from the kings of Ireland, which was his native country. His birth, in the year five hundred and twenty-one, was preceded by some extraordinary intimations of his future sanctity and eminence. The most learned men of that day were his tutors and dignified him when a child with the title of saint. At the age of twenty-eight he founded the monastery of Darnagh now Derry in Ireland, where, not long ago a copy of the Gospels transcribed by his hand, was extant. He afterwards visited the continent of Europe, where his labours were so acceptable, that Sigibert, king of France, made him large offers to induce him to remain in his dominions; to which Columba replied, "I, who have resigned my own property for Christ, ought not to grasp at that of others." After his return to Ireland, he cast a compassionate eye on the islands of Scotland, which lay in the darkness of Paganism, and in five hundred and sixty-three, when he was forty-two years of age, he crossed over in a wicker boat, covered with hides, and settled in the island of Iona. This was the origin of the Culdees, on whom was pronounced a censure, which is their highest praise, that they taught only what they could learn from the prophetic, evangelical, and apostolical writings. Columba here endured incredible hardships. The infuriate Druids, who pretended to magic, opposed him as the destroyer of their superstition. "When do you sail," said one of them to Columba. "On the third day," replied Columba, "if God

The seventh century was the age of papal corruption. Austin called a council, at which the British clergy were induced to attend by the advice of a hermit, in order to judge from the humility or pride of the archbishop, whether he was from heaven or from beneath.* The grand discussion was what Beza derides as *quæstio lunatica*, a lunatic dispute, on what day of the moon Easter should be kept. For the sacred Scriptures, being ignorant of Easter altogether,* had not, of course, decided the time of celebration: and thus a pious queen in this age was left to fast for the crucifixion of the Saviour, at the same hour as her royal consort of different faith was rejoicing in his resurrection. These ecclesiastics were also sitting in council to determine in what manner they should shave their heads, whether in the form of a crown or a

will, and I live." "I will raise storms, and cover you with darkness," cried the Druid Broichan. "All things," replied the Christian, "are under the controul of the omnipotent God, and I am guided by him." Columba displayed an extraordinary spirit of devotion and diligence in his ministry. He studied the Scriptures with intense application, and required his disciples to prove every doctrine by producing texts from the inspired word. Hence they were preserved from the growing corruptions of popery, and were, for many ages, the asylum of truth and pure religion, when other parts of the British isles were grovelling in darkness and superstition. We shall again have occasion to notice the light which missionaries from this college diffused in other parts of Britain. Columba died on the Sabbath, at midnight vigils, in the place of worship, on the ninth of June, five hundred and ninety-seven, in his seventy-seventh year. His writings are said to have been numerous, but those which are extant, are chiefly hymns for divine service in monkish Latin rhyme.—Dr. Smith's *Life of St. Columba*, passim. Spanheim. Mosheim.

* Fuller, b. II. p. 61.

† It is well known, that the mention of the word, in Acts xii. 4. is a mere error of the translators; for the Greek should have been rendered *passover*.

cross. At length, Austin, unable to bow our stubborn Britons to a foreign yoke, excommunicated those who possessed what little religion yet remained. He then sought to indemnify the Roman communion by the conversion of the Pagan Saxons whom he is said to have baptized in crowds. In the course of this century, indeed, all the kings and nations of the heptarchy were brought into the Roman, if not the Christian fold.

Austin having died about the year six hundred and ten, was buried at Canterbury; and as Ethelbert departed this life shortly after, his son and successor, with many of his subjects, shook off the profession of Christianity. Laurentius, who succeeded Austin, was preparing to follow those priests who had fled from our apostate isle, when St. Peter was sent to chastise his cowardice, by a severe nocturnal flagellation. He then presented himself before Eadbald, the Pagan king, black and blue with apostolic stripes; which so wrought upon his majesty, as to induce him to renounce his incestuous amours, and embrace the Christian religion*. Such are the tales with which the history of these times abounds.

Theodore, a native of Tarsus, in Cilicia, was sent over by the pope, as archbishop of Canterbury, but, alas, a bishop of a different spirit from his countryman Paul. He reduced, by his visitations, the whole of the Saxon empire to the Roman uniformity; though a great part of his life was spent in hunting out Wilfrid, archbishop of York, who was unhappy enough to excite his jealousy. Theodore is renowned as the best scholar, and greatest promoter of schools that Britain had ever known. He was celebrated, through all the western church,

* Fuller, b. II. p. 70.

for writing a penitential, or treatise to direct what penance shall be enjoined for certain crimes; a book which now excites only contempt and disgust*. All communion with the Scotch, or British bishops is forbidden, and their orders pronounced invalid; though if there were any real Christians among us at that time, they were the men †. Yet, by an uninterrupted succession from Theodore and his Popish monks, some now claim the exclusive validity of their ministry.

Sigebert, king of the east Angles, is extolled as a pious prince, whose zeal for learning founded the university of Cambridge; though Oxford denies this. A Northumbrian chief, called Oswald, sent for some Scotch preachers from the monastery of Columba at Iona, to teach his subjects the doctrines of the Gospel. The first who came was too rough to succeed with the rough; but, afterwards, Aidan and Finan, with some others, are celebrated as worthy men, who won many to the knowledge and love of Christ. They are particularly praised for the same excellence for which their countrymen have since been distinguished, the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures; and from every thing recorded concerning their spirit, their conduct, and their labours, they appear to have been burning and shining lights in this dark and depraved age. St. Columbanus, from Ireland, who has been frequently confounded with Columba of Iona,

* The fragments which lie before us are too impure to be presented to the public eye in a modern tongue. Persons newly married are commanded to abstain from entering a church for thirty days, and to repent for fifteen. Animals caught in a net must not be eaten. The profane laity are not allowed to sing the sacred word Allelujah.

† Spanheim Introd. ad Histor. Sacr. vol. II. p. 385.

Willebrod, an Anglo-Saxon, and eleven others, went on a mission to Batavia, and afterwards spread the Gospel in the countries on the shores of the Baltic*.

The eighth, though a century of vice, is celebrated as the æra of great men. Wilfrid, the quarrelsome prelate of York, was called the Athanasius of his day; rather because he withstood all the world, than for his heroism in maintaining any important point. While kings were imitating the mortifications of hermits, he displayed the pomp of kings. Athelmus, the first bishop of Sherbourne, was also the first Englishman who wrote in Latin: he taught his countrymen to compose Latin verse†. But the venerable Bede may be called, in sacred language, “a light that shineth in a dark place.” He wrote on various learned subjects. By his ecclesiastical history of England, he rescued the period which we have reviewed, from total oblivion. His homilies were, for some time, read in all the churches; but his translation of the Gospel of John, into English, conferred greater advantages on the church‡. Alcuinus was the instructor of his age, and the glory of our island. Himself taught by the venerable Bede, he instructed Charlemagne, emperor of the West, in rhetoric, logic, mathematics, and divinity, and was called the emperor’s delight. Sextus Senensis pretended that his book on the Trinity was written by Calvin, and published under the name of Alcuinus§. With the aid of Clement, a Scot, he established the French

* Mosheim, p. 231. † Fuller, book II. p. 94.

‡ Millar’s Propagation of Christianity, vol. II. p. 141. Spauheim, Mosheim.

§ Lampe’s Synopsis, p. 82.

universities at Paris, Soissons, and Tours, in addition to an academy at Charles's court, for the instruction of the emperor, and his nobles. It was a proverb among the learned of his day: "A man born in a remote corner of the world has astonished the whole globe with his genius*." These two illustrated the sacred Scriptures, and opposed the growing corruptions of image-worship, though this idolatry was sanctioned by the second council of Nice.

We indulge the pleasing hope, that some of these names will be found written in the book of life. May we not presume, that men who laboured to translate and explain the Scriptures, drew their own principles from these sacred sources? More than one of them incurred the hatred of churchmen; and Clement, while abused by Baronius, is honoured by Spanheim for asserting, that we should confess our sins to God rather than man. But with these exceptions in favour of good sense and religion, all ranks were infected with the mania of monkery. Kings and queens were eager to exchange their royal robes for the habit of some religious order; not merely those who had lived to see the world retire from them, but even youthful queens and princes at the summit of their glory. As it was the fashion to hunt for relics, the body of St. Alban was discovered, and disturbed with superstitious honours. Several councils were held in England during this age and early in the following: one more famous than the rest met at Cleveshoo, in Kent. Their canons afford melancholy proofs of the ignorance and impurity of the age; ignorance, which made it a merit for the priests to know the creed and Lord's prayer; and impurity, which

* Lampe's Synopsiis, p. 82.

could publish such rules of virtue, as no person of common modesty could endure to read*.

Egbert, king of Wessex, or the West Saxons, had been forced to retire in his youth to the court of France, where he derived great advantages from the learned men, whom Charlemagne had gathered round him. He returned to show that knowledge is power; for he soon made himself supreme monarch, and gave to his kingdom the name of Anglesland, or England. But his reign was disturbed by the irruptions of the Danes, who were yet savage Pagans. These marauders, the refuse of all the nations which bordered on the Baltic, having once ravaged the isle of Sheppey with impunity, they tasted enough of the sweets of Britain to determine on the conquest of a country which now seemed to trust for its defence to the crucifix instead of the sword†. Their rage was principally directed against the monasteries, which they levelled with the ground, and almost extinguished the religious orders. King Edmund, whom they vanquished, refusing to deny the Saviour, they tied him to a tree, and pierced him with arrows till he died. The place of his sepulchre was, in honour to his memory, called St. Edmund's Bury. Ethelwolph, the son and successor of Egbert, full of the superstition of the times, gave, by a solemn charter, the tithes of all the kingdom to the clergy, because, according to his own confession, he was alarmed by the Pagan Danes, and wished, by this act of piety, to procure the pardon of his sins, and the salvation of his soul‡.

* Fuller, book II. p. 107.

† Miller's Propagation of Christianity.

‡ Fuller, p. 110.

But if the son of Solomon was a fool, the son of Ethelwolp was the renowned Alfred. After a long and bloody conflict with the Danes, he succeeded in establishing himself on the throne, which was filled by him with as much honour, as it had been acquired with valour. For gentleness of disposition, improvement of time, and purity of manners, he is highly extolled. To him has been attributed that palladium of our liberties, trial by jury; and when a king writes an invective against unjust judges, may we not hope, that in his own government he would imitate “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, who sitteth on the throne judging righteously? *”

At this time, John Scotus, surnamed Erigena, to mark him a Scot, or an Irishman, is mentioned as the most learned man of his age and nation. He appears to have thought common sense no heretic,

* From the thickest shades of darkness, he emerged as the morning star, for he was twelve years of age before a master could be found to undertake his education; and he complained, that south of the Thames he had none who could read English. But he invited over learned men, who delivered lectures at Oxford, of which university he is considered the founder. In proof of this, Fuller appeals to Alfred's arms in University College, with an inscription which informs us that he built that edifice.

Nobilis Alfredi sunt hæc insignia cujus,

Primum constructa est hæc pietate domus.

Fuller's Ch. Hist. b. ii. 217. Spanheim.

His literary works are sufficient to procure him reputation as an author, though he had not worn a crown. A manual of pious meditations, a version of the Psalms of David, and a translation (from the Vulgate we suppose) of the Old and New Testament, are attributed to, his pen. Viewed in every light, where can we find so good evidence of true religion on a throne? He died the twenty-eighth of October, nine hundred, and was buried at Hyde Abbey, Winchester.

and opposed the increasing infatuation of the times, by declaring, that in the Lord's Supper we have not the body and blood of our Lord, but a memorial and sign.

We might pass over the tenth century as an absolute blank in the history of real religion in England. Ethelstan, however, is said to have laboured to promote the translation of the Scriptures in his dominions. But the most prominent character of the age, is Dunstan, who, from a monk, contrived, through various fortunes, to raise himself to the see of Canterbury. His conflict with the devil, is akin to other lying miracles by which he supported his power; reminding us of the inspired prediction of antichrist, "whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders.*" Dunstan assisted Edgar to usurp his brother's throne; and both king and priest (the former of whom had all the vices of the beast, and the latter of the demon) persecuted the married clergy, in order to fill all the benefices with monks†. The Danes, allured by rich monasteries, and cowardly priests, cruelly ravaged the country through all this age.

The eleventh century opens with a view of Danish kings upon the British throne. Canute is represented as at first a sacriligious murderer, who afterwards attempted to expiate his crimes by prodigal superstitions. One instance of it was, that renouncing the use of his crown, he sent it to Winchester, to be placed on the image of Jesus.

Edward, who is surnamed the confessor, is the

* 2 Thess. ii. 9.

† Fuller, 128.

favourite king with the monkish historians. From him the British monarchs derive all the power they possess to cure the king's evil. William the Conqueror introduced a new dynasty, checked the pope's encroachments on the regal powers, and when called upon to own himself a vassal of the holy see, replied, "I hold my kingdom from none but God, and my sword." The rude soldier seems to have achieved more for the cause of religion, than the sainted Confessor; for he introduced a more manly independent tone, and allowed men to think of religion for themselves. He was such a promoter of learning, which the Danish ravages had reduced to the lowest ebb, that Mosheim styles him the *Mecænas* of the age*.

Of William Rufus, who succeeded the Conqueror, ecclesiastics have given a hideous picture; for he seems to have viewed them in their true light, and to have felt himself authorised to wrest from them by force, what they had gained from the people by fraud.

Should the reader say, "all this is the history of kings and monks, where were the Christians?" we reply, buried in obscurity so profound, that they have eluded our utmost research. Alfric, archbishop of Canterbury, is celebrated as the author of homilies to be read in churches, which breathe more of the evangelical spirit than the times would have led us to expect†. Elpheg, his successor, displayed the true spirit of a primitive martyr, in his refusal to betray what he thought the interests of the church to the fierce persecuting Danes. "Shall I be afraid, says he, to go to heaven, because a violent death lies in

* Mosheim, 337.

† Mosheim, 366.

the way? I have given the enemy no just occasion to use me ill. It is true, I have converted some of the most considerable of them to Christianity; but if this be a fault, I shall be happy in suffering for it. If you think the Danes are particularly enraged against me for reproving them for their immorality and injustice, I cannot help it. I am bound to these remonstrances by my commission; and unless I give the wicked man warning, his blood will be upon my head. Shall I flee, and desert my worthy countrymen? What can I be less than a hireling, if when I see the wolf ready to devour my sheep, I presently run away, and leave them to shift for themselves? I am resolved, therefore, to stand the shock, and submit to the order of providence." He was cruelly murdered by the Danes, and we would hope now wears the martyr's crown*.

The glimpse of religion which we behold in this passage, induces us to hope, that there were a few witnesses for the truth, who knew "a more excellent way" than the gross superstitions then in vogue. Some of the monasteries, it is probable, contained men who, with pure motives, devoted themselves to prayer and the study of the Scriptures, whence they learned to sigh in secret over the ignorance and pollution which reigned around them.

Henry, surnamed Beauclerc, or the learned, summoned a council, in which canons were decreed against the infamous crimes of priests, and especially against their marriages. The prelates, most famed for sanctity, were the greatest enemies to the priests' wives; but many of the clergy, particularly those of

* Warner's Eccl. Hist. of England, vol. I. p. 223.

Norfolk, loving their wives better than their bishops, and refusing to suffer man to separate what God had joined, the king at last took the affair into his own hand, and allowed the priests to keep their wives by parting with their money, and thus paying for what was already their own*.

When Stephen seized the crown, and enflamed the whole kingdom with the contests between him and the empress Maud, the clergy, with courtly facility, treated their oaths of allegiance, says Fuller, "as seamen treat their compass, saying them backwards and forwards†." Whole ages were spent with the fierce and haughty conflicts of the prelates; sometimes with each other, and sometimes with their king. Ecclesiastics had now claimed an exemption from civil jurisdiction, and a right of appealing to Rome in all their affairs. Henry was at one time informed, that, since his accession, a hundred murders had been committed by men in holy orders, who all escaped the death which they deserved‡.

* John de Crema, an Italian legate, deputed by his holiness to frighten the English clergy out of their wits, and their wives, after making a furious harangue against the indecency of an ecclesiastic rising from the bed of his wife to consecrate the sacred host, was caught the same night in the embraces of a harlot. This afforded a fine triumph for those who disliked his mission, and a striking illustration of the propriety with which the sacred Scriptures have united the commendation of marriage, and the prohibition of whoredom. "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers, and adulterers God will judge."

† Fuller, b. III. p. 23.

‡ The primate of all England complains, in a letter, that a very learned priest had been murdered at Winchester, by a man and his wife, who do not deny the fact; but the murderer, who is going away to Rome, makes no doubt that by prostituting his wife, who is a very handsome woman, he shall not only obtain absolution, but be well paid for his journey. Warner, vol. II. p. 393.

But while Henry, with much justice, opposed this exemption of priests from the jurisdiction of the laws, the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket, became the hero of his order, and filled, not only England, but all Europe, with his fame. From an obsequious courtier, he suddenly became a stern, mortified priest, armed with all the haughty sanctity of the times; and by a long course of stubborn distress, and insolent prosperity, he so embittered the life of his prince, that Henry, in a passion, exclaimed, "have I none that will rid me of this insolent priest?" Some courtiers, eager to gratify their master's revenge, stabbed him at the altar of Canterbury cathedral. Although the king declared himself innocent of all serious intentions against the prelate's life, it is probable, the vengeance was to him like the prophetic roll, sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the belly. He was compelled to endure severe mortifications, and at last to do penance for the crime of which he had sworn himself innocent, by yielding his bare back to be scourged by the monks. Becket dying for the rights of the clergy, was canonized, performed wondrous cures on those who visited his sepulchre, and drew incalculable treasures to his shrine; so that it was said, "to Becket was offered much, to Mary little, to Jesus nothing*."

The crusade, or the expedition to Palestine, to recover the Holy Land from the hands of the Mahometans, was the folly of the day, in which Richard Cœur de Lion, with vast multitudes of his subjects embarked.

Amidst all this superstition we have to record, that in the year one thousand one hundred and sixty, some

* Mosheim, 402.

real Christians sought in Britain, an asylum from the persecutions of Germany. But, alas ! they found only a premature grave. Regarding them as contemptible heretics, the writers of these times record their history in a way so cursory and confused, that it is difficult to ascertain facts. It is however confessed, that the leader of these refugees, whose name was Gerrard, was neither ignorant nor illiterate, though we are told his followers were ; because forsooth they made no other reply to the cavils of their enemies, than "we believe as we are taught by the word of God." A council was called by Henry, to meet at Oxford, in order to try these thirty heretics, who were not likely to meet with either mercy or justice from an assembly of haughty prelates. They were condemned ; branded on the forehead ; publicly whipped out of the town ; and, being turned into the fields, in the depth of winter, when all were forbidden to relieve them, they perished. Even their enemies allow that they behaved with great calmness and moderation ; and when the inhuman sentence was executed upon them, they sang, "blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and persecute you." Warner justly observes, that "their conduct was worthy of the best and most righteous cause, and would incline one to think favourably of their doctrine *." They were most probably our first martyrs to pure religion, and the duty of separating from a corrupt communion. Some historians call them Publicans, others Vaudois, and Waldenses. They were, doubtless, a branch of those confessors, whom Henry, at the request of the king of France, persecuted on the continent, as well as in our isle.

* Warner Ecc. Hist. vol. I. 349 ; Petrie's Ecc. Hist. 329 ; Gillie's, 31, 32.

Our limits forbid us to turn aside to the history of these fathers of the reformation ; but we may observe, that the ancient Britons, together with the Scots and Irish, being deluged with the general corruption, and the established church, every where become an apostate harlot, it was now both the duty and the inclination of real Christians to come out from Babylon ; so that we must, in future, look for the disciples of Christ among those who are branded as heretics. The popish writers affirm, that the Waldenses were found in England and Scotland ; and Wickliffe, together with John Huss and Jerome of Prague, are mentioned as their followers. Indeed the doctrines which the Waldenses are accused of teaching in England, during this century, so exactly correspond with those which Wickliffe afterwards more successfully diffused, that there is no doubt of his having learned from this school.

The thirteenth century commences with the reign of John, who was all that a king ought not to be. He involved himself in disputes, both with the clergy and barons, which ended in his entire defeat. For the crime of the monarch, in refusing to allow the pope's nomination of Langton to the see of Canterbury, the whole kingdom was laid under an interdict, by which the churches were sealed up ; the ceremonies, on which the salvation of men was then supposed to depend, were intermitted ; the lover could not complete his wishes by holy matrimony ; and the bodies of the dead were not only denied interment in consecrated ground, but were thrown into ditches, or on the highways, to the annoyance of the living. The king himself was afterwards excommunicated

from the holy mother-church ; and at last, his kingdom was given to Philip of France. John, destitute of internal resources, and of able counsellors, who could have taught him to defeat the pope's artifices, at length submitted in a strain, which shows that tyrants are dastards. The pope's legate, after trampling upon the money which John payed him, and keeping the king's crown and sceptre in his possession five days, restored them to him, who knew not how to wear them, and reconciled his majesty to the church*.

Were we writing a history of learning, we should feel ourselves bound to give a distinguished place to the name of Roger Bacon, a Franciscan monk, who cultivated experimental philosophy with so much success, that his cotemporaries deemed him a magician, for which imaginary crime, he was long imprisoned in prison.

Robert Grosteste, or Greathead, bishop of Lincoln, narrowly escaped a similar fate. The popes were now pursuing a scheme for draining the kingdom of its money, and securing all its lucrative benefices to Italians. The bishops were charged, at one time, to provide for a hundred of these hungry foreigners ; and now Innocent IVth commanded Greathead to give the first vacant canon's place to a boy, who was nephew to his holiness. But the hardy prelate wrote to the pope, " that if we except the sins of Lucifer and antichrist, there can be no greater crime than to deprive the souls of men of the spiritual aid of their pastors, by conferring the benefices on persons incapable of performing the duties." This so enflamed the unhallowed passions of his holiness, that he swore

* Fuller, book III. 51.

by St. Peter and St. Paul, if it were not for the gentleness of his disposition, he would so confound this doting old man, make him such a prodigy of a wretch, that all Christendom should stand amazed at his punishment. One of the cardinals lowered his tone, by entreating him not to precipitate, say some, that revolt and separation from Rome, which must one day take place. We must confess, said the cardinal, that he is a holy man, of more religious life than any of us; yea, Christendom hath not his equal; a great philosopher; skilled in Latin and Greek; a constant preacher; a lover of chastity; and a loather of simony. His illustrious friend, Roger Bacon, pronounces him and Adam de Marisco, the two most learned men in the world, who excelled all the rest of mankind, both in divine and human knowledge. Greathead is said to have written two hundred volumes: he died in the year one thousand two hundred and fifty-three*.

Lampe mentions an English knight, Peter Cassiadore, who wrote an epistle to the British church, on shaking off the tyranny of the Roman pontiff†, Walter Mapez, archdeacon of Oxford, opposed the church of Rome, and to secure himself, craftily employed a silly buffoon to repeat the satyrical Latin rhymes which he composed against his holiness‡.

The commencement of the fourteenth century was the golden age of popery; and had the accustomed march of affairs continued uninterrupted to its close, our isle had been one vast monastery, and the English a nation of monks. But the greedy insolent

* Warner, Lampe, Mosheim.

† Lampe Synopsis, 281.

‡ Petrie's Christian History, 446.

avarice of the court of Rome, and the pride of the priesthood, which was now become proverbial, prepared the nation for the auspicious events which shortly happened. For, as the Roman historian has observed, when empires have arrived at their acme, they become stationary, fall into decrepitude, and rush to ruin. In the state, as well as the church, this was an age of portentous agitations: two kings were deposed and murdered; on which Fuller remarks, "that the clergy were the first to lead this dance of disloyalty, and that, in all state alterations, be they never so bad, the pulpit will be of the same wood as the council-board*." While, however, the pope strove to profit in this scramble for power, by untoward circumstances, he was greatly the loser. Edward III. emboldened, as well by his own heroic temper, as by his splendid victories in France, and favoured by a long and prosperous reign, clipped the wings of the Roman eagle, by forbidding the clergy to send to Italy the money which he needed for his armies. The statutes of Mortmain and Premunire opposed an effectual check to the aggrandisement of the clergy, by preventing the misguided contrition of the dying from lavishing their estates on the monks, and by prohibiting the pope to nominate his Italians to benefices before they became vacant.

Now, as the Arabian traveller rejoices to arrive at an island of verdant fertility amidst deserts of sand, we congratulate ourselves, and our readers, on our arrival at the period when we are relieved from the melancholy disguests of gross darkness, and contemptible superstitions, by the re-appearance of true reli-

* Fuller's Church History, book IV. p. 153. . .

gion. We account it the glory of our Isle, that over its bosom hovered the morning star, which led the benighted nations to the Saviour. Germany has lately been roused to erect a monument to its brightest ornament Luther; and it is the pleasing duty of a British ecclesiastical historian to rear a grateful tribute to the memory of Wickliffe.

That there was some real religion in our isle before his time we doubt not; for in the course of our researches, we have sometimes felt that "we trode on concealed fires." The persecuted Germans, who were led by Gerrard to seek an asylum here, we have already noticed; and as the Waldenses and Bohemians preserved a holy seed pure from the papal corruption*, so they maintained some connexion with this country, though their first colony perished by the fury of persecution. We shall shortly have occasion to notice the intercourse which Wickliffe maintained with them, from whom indeed it seems that he derived that light of pure religion which shone so clearly in his writings: though when it is asserted, that he received his first knowledge of the truth from one friar Lollard, who brought the doctrine of the Waldenses into England†, it is difficult to determine whether this were a proper name, or only a title of reproach, given to one who maintained the principles of the Lollards.

John de Wickliffe was born in the year one thousand three hundred and twenty-four, in the parish of Wickliffe, in Yorkshire. Having been educated at Oxford, he took the degree of doctor in divinity there,

* Lampe's *Historia Ecclesiæ Reformatæ in Hungaria, et passim.*

† Clarke's *Lives*, quoted by Gillies *Histo. Col.* vol. I. p. 34.

and read public lectures, which were much admired; doubtless, not the less for being seasoned with warm invectives against the begging friars. A sentence of the pope, excluding him from the office of warden of Canterbury college, contributed to sharpen his opposition to the papacy, which he had before declared in his writings. He then published a defence of the kingdom against the pope's demand of homage, which introduced him to court, where he was appointed to an important embassy. He was presented by the king, in one thousand three hundred and seventy-four, to the rectory of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, and in the year following, to a prebend in the church of Westbury.

After he had, for some time, opposed the tyranny and superstitions of the church of Rome, without much serious resistance, a bull was sent to the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of London, to seize the heretic, and throw him in irons, as a complete answer to all his arguments. The pope also wrote to the king to favour the bishops in the prosecution, and to the university of Oxford, to expel this pestilential doctor. But in the meanwhile Edward III. died, and Richard II. being a minor, his uncle John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and the queen mother, protected Wickliffe, who seems to have been also the popular favourite. The reformer was called, in one thousand three hundred and seventy-six, before a synod in St. Paul's cathedral; but being accompanied by the Duke of Lancaster, Lord Percy, and other powerful supporters, Wickliffe was a mere silent spectator of the rude quarrel between the prelates and nobles, which ended in a riot, and left him

to depart unhurt, and uncensured*. He had the intrepidity to present to the parliament, in one thousand three hundred and seventy-nine, a severe philippic against the tyranny of the church of Rome, and to write against the supremacy and infallibility of the pope.

He wisely prepared the way for his translation of the Bible, on which he was labouring, by a book on the truth of the Scriptures, entitled, *The Path to perfect Knowledge*; in which he urges Christian men and women, young and old, to study the Scriptures diligently, especially the New Testament, which, say he, "is full of authority, and gives understanding to the simple, especially in all points needful to salvation." He boldly asserts, that as Elijah had the truth of God against King Ahab and eight hundred and fifty priests of Baal, so a few poor men and idiots, in comparison of learned clerks, may have the truth now in opposition to all the prelates and clergy. If a man, says he, abstain from swearing, and out of charity reprove sin, he is branded and persecuted as a heretic and a Lollard; but if any one determine to defend himself against the persecution of the prelates, he has only to swear boldly by Christ's bones, nails, and limbs, and be proud, lecherous and profane†. Having published sixteen conclusions, in the first of which he openly denied the doctrine of transubstantiation, they were condemned by the chancellor of Oxford. He appealed to the king and parliament; but perceiving the friendship of the court, which was rather political finesse, than pious zeal, growing cold, he withdrew from the storm; and, according to some, made a confession of error at

* Fuller, book IV. p. 135.

† Petric, p. 502.

Oxford; while others assert him to have been banished.

At length he retired to his living of Lutterworth, where he reared the pillars of the reformation, by completing, with immense labour, his translation of the Scriptures. A stroke of the palsy, in the year thirteen hundred and eighty seven, removed him to his reward. Of the opinions with which he was charged, we select the following specimen. "It is blasphemy to call any but Christ head of the church. Peter had no more power than the rest of the apostles. The pope is no successor of Peter, unless he imitates him. The infallibility of the church of Rome is blasphemy. By the abomination which maketh desolate, spoken of in Mathew, is meant the pope. Bishop's benedictions, confirmations, consecration of churches, are only tricks to get money. There were only two orders in the apostles' times, priests and deacons. The church of God consists only of the elect. Tythes are a purely voluntary support to ministers, not to be enforced by penalties. Wise men leave that undetermined which the Scriptures have not settled. All writers, since the year one thousand of the Christian æra, were heretics. Baptism is not essential to salvation, nor can it confer grace, or take away sin. Sacred initiation into holy orders is not essential, as it impresses no character. Vowing virginity is a doctrine of devils. The worship of saints is idolatry*."

Who can seriously reflect on the thick darkness from which this sacred genius emerged, and not acknowledge with mingled astonishment and admiration, the clearness, justness, and comprehension of

* Fuller, book IV. p. 131.

his views? The people whose history we are now introducing will readily perceive that Wickliffe was the first of puritans, as well as of protestants, and that in many leading articles he as truly dissents with us, from the religion now established, as he then did from the papal hierarchy. He presents an instructive and encouraging proof of the efficacy of the Scriptures to make men wise to salvation ; for his translation of the Bible was at once a cause and an effect of his superior knowledge of religion. Who can wonder that principles, which so forcibly appealed to common sense, and were so well calculated to liberate mankind from the galling fetters of priestly tyranny under which they were groaning, should find a numerous host of admirers? To avoid opposition was impossible.

But we naturally ask, how the daring promulgator of such offensive truths could escape the deadly fangs of the great red dragon. Perhaps his boldness, which was tempered with a happy portion of prudence, embarrassed his enemies, and left them no means of attempting his life with any prospect of success. His numerous writings were wisely adapted to spread his sentiments more rapidly, and to diffuse sufficient knowledge to welcome his translation when it should appear. Those who had retained the truth of religion, amidst the abomination which made all desolate, especially the concealed Lollards, or Waldenses, would naturally seize with avidity, sentiments so congenial with their taste, and regard their author, as a noble witness for the truth, which they had maintained at the hazard of their lives. At the same time many, to whom the principles were wholly new, felt their divine power, and blessed

him through whose "tender mercies, the day-spring from on high had visited them, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace."

By the labours of Wickliffe, or of those from whom he derived his sentiments, the lovers of truth were so numerous, that in the reign of Richard the second, an act of parliament notices many persons who preached in church-yards and markets, without licence of the ordinary. The village preachers of the present day may see that they are in good company. Wickliffe's letters diffused the same spirit on the continent; for Jerome of Prague, and some Bohemian brethren, returning to their own country, carried with them an epistle from our reformer to John Huss and his brethren, which breathes a spirit worthy of the writer, who was now in the last year of his life. As it is a curiosity, we present the substance of it to our readers*.

* *Carissimi in Domino fratres, &c.* Dearest brethren in the Lord, whom I love in the truth, and not I only, but also all who have known the truth: that truth, I say, which remaineth in you, and shall be with you for ever, through the grace of God. I rejoice greatly that the brethren who came from you, bear testimony to your belief of the truth, and that ye also walk in the truth. I have heard, brother, how antichrist afflicts you, bringing numerous and various tribulations on the disciples of Christ. Nor is it wonderful that you are treated thus, since, through the whole world, the law of Christ is now oppressed by the adversaries, and that great many-headed dragon, of which John speaks in the Revelation, hath cast out of its mouth a vast flood after the woman to swallow her up. But our most faithful Lord will certainly deliver his only spouse, faithful to himself. Let us, therefore, be strong in the Lord our God, and in his immense goodness, firmly believing that he will not permit his beloved friends to fail in their good purpose, provided we love him as we ought with our whole heart. For adversity would not have prevailed, if iniquity had not. Therefore, let no affliction, or oppression for Christ, depress us; since we know, that

The sentiments of Wickliffe, or, in other words, the principles of religion, took possession of many minds, both in England and Scotland ; and some are

whomsoever the Lord receives into the number of his sons he chastens. For it is the will of the Father of mercies that we should be exercised with afflictions in the present life, that he may spare us in the future, because the gold, which the supreme artificer chuses, he desires to have purged thoroughly in the fire here, that he may deposit it hereafter in his most pure, eternal treasury. We see the time which we possess here is short and transitory, but the life which we expect in future is blessed and eternal. Let us labour, therefore, as long as time with us shall last, that we may be found worthy to enter into that rest. What do we see in this life, but pains, and griefs, and labours, and that which should most affect believers, the contempt and violation of the divine law? Let us, therefore, strive with all our powers, to lay hold of those blessings which shall be durable and eternal, denying our earthly, perishing appetites. Let us view the conversation of the brethren in former ages, let us behold the saints of the Old and New Testament ; how they endured tossings and afflictions on this ocean, suffering bonds and imprisonments, were stoned, sawn asunder, and slain by the sword. They wandered about in sheep skins, and goat skins, and suffered other trials, which the epistle to the Hebrews largely relates. All going in the narrow way, in the footsteps of Christ, who said, where I am, my servants shall be. "Therefore, having so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside," &c. But let us seek help from the Lord, and fight manfully against antichrist his adversary. Let us therefore love his law from the heart, and not be fraudulent labourers, but in all things, as far as the Lord enables, act boldly, and be brave in the cause of God, in hopes of the eternal reward. Thou, therefore, Huss, my dearly beloved brother in Christ, unknown to me indeed by face, yet not in faith and love, (for the ends of the earth cannot separate those whom the love of Christ unites) be strong in the grace which is given to thee. Fight as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, in word or deed, and recall whomsoever thou canst into the way of truth ; for neither on account of erroneous and lying decrees, nor for the sake of the errors of antichrist, is the truth of the Gospel to be detained in silence. Rather, confounding the craft of satan, comfort and establish the members of Christ. For shortly, the Lord willing, antichrist shall come to an end.

recorded as martyrs to their truth. The bishops were obliged to enforce the necessity of confession by public edicts; and all suspected persons were called to make a solemn abjuration. "I promise," say they, "to be buxom to the holy church, and to the archbishop." Wickliffe had, however, several honourable coadjutors in the cause of truth. John Trevisa, vicar of Berkley, is said to have made a translation of the Scriptures into English*. Robert Longland attacked the antichristian beast, in a piece of satirical poetry, called the complaint and prayer of a ploughman. He complains of the pride of the priests, and the lasciviousness of the unmarried clergy, as well as of the trade in sins, and the souls of men, by purchasing pardons and ecclesiastical livings for money. He derides purgatory, and treats the pope as antichrist. Our ancient critics speak of this production in terms of high praise. Richard, archbishop of Armagh, opposed the monks, and, translated the Bible into the Irish tongue†. Thomas Bradwardine, archbishop of Canterbury, was not only one of the most learned men of his day, but also a noble defender of the doctrine of grace, against the Pelagians. Our ancient poet, Chaucer, was evidently disposed to assist in overturning the throne of the pope.

This affords me great joy that in your kingdom, and elsewhere, God hath so strengthened the hearts of some, that they even endure with joy prisons, exiles, and death for the word of God. I have therefore, my dearest friend, nothing farther to write: but I confess I could most willingly confirm thee, and all of you, who love the law of Christ in that love. So I salute them all from my inmost soul, especially thy coadjutor in the Gospel of Christ, entreating you to pray for me, and for the whole church of Christ. "Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead," &c.—*Come-nius ratio disciplinæ in unitate fratrum Bohemorum*, p. 6.

* Fuller, b. IV. p. 151.

† Petrie, 496.

We have, through many centuries, been compelled to measure our progress by mere barren dates, which present no idea to the mind, as in a long night of sickness we count the clock, because nothing else occurs to diversify the tedious stillness; but we may now advance from æra to æra of lively interest, and high importance. Henry the fourth, before his usurpation of the throne, pretended to favour the popular doctrines of the Wickliffites or Lollards; but when in the seat of power, he courted the clergy to sanctify his crimes: thus while they pronounced their ghostly benediction on his treason, he burned those whom they branded for heretics.

In this reign was enacted the barbarous law, which consigns men to the flames for their religious opinions. A statute so abhorrent to humanity, justice, and religion was too welcome to the ignorant and savage clergy, to lie idle in their hands. In the year one thousand four hundred and one, William Sautré, a priest of London, was accused of various crimes, one of which may suggest the nature of the rest:—he would not worship the cross, but only him that died on it. That the honour of the priesthood might not be tarnished, before he was delivered to the secular power he was degraded to a layman, by stripping him of all the foppery of the sacred orders*.

But many viewed the horrid death of this proto-

* As a priest he was deprived of the patin and chalice; the chasule was stripped from his back as a deacon; the New Testament, and the stole were taken from him as subdeacon; the alb and maniple as acolyte; that he might cease to be an exorcist, he was deprived of the book of conjurations; the volume of church legends was taken from his hands, and with it the office of reader; with the key of the church door he resigned the office of sexton, He was then committed to the flames,—Fuller, b. IV. p. 156.

protestant martyr, as a chariot of fire, in which, like Elijah, his happy spirit ascended to the skies. John Badby, an illiterate mechanic, suffered for the same cause; and though the prince of Wales made him the most tempting offers, if he would conform to the faith of the holy church, he nobly persisted to give his body to be burned, for what appeared to him a purer faith. Even the House of Commons was suspected of being tinged with the heretical pravity, for they proposed to the king to seize the church lands, and petitioned for a mitigation of the severities towards the Lollards. But the king and the clergy afforded each other mutual support. The lords spiritual and temporal petitioned that justice might be done upon these troublers of Israel; complaining that unlawful conventicles were held, and that preaching in schools, and private houses diffused the poison of heresy among his majesty's liege subjects. Already Wickiffe's bible was secreted as a precious, though forbidden, treasure, and the effects of it appeared in teaching men to despise consecrated walls, to hold meetings wherever they could hear the Scriptures explained, and offer worship congenial with its spirit and dictates to God alone, through "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." These were the non-conformists of their day; and their numbers were so great, that it was confessed to be impossible to provide prisons to contain them; for Walsingham, the historian, is said to have reckoned them at a hundred thousand.

When Henry the fourth had departed to answer to the eternal King, for introducing the practice of burning men alive for religion, and archbishop Arun-

del, who had been the great incendiary, both in church and state, had been starved to death by a disease in his throat (which the Lollards interpreted as a judgment on him, for starving the souls of men), new troubles still vexed the clergy, and called forth all their bigotry. Sir John Oldcastle, lord Cobham, had been considered as the head of the Lollards, and was therefore singled out, in the quaint language of that age, to turn or burn. Henry the fifth, esteeming the valiant knight, tried his powers of persuasion upon him; but as he remained immoveable, he was committed to prison. Having made his escape, he fled into Wales, where he lay for some time concealed. By the serpentine craft of the clergy, the king was induced to believe a ridiculous story of his raising an insurrection against the throne, so that when he was taken, it was pretended that he suffered as a traitor, and not as a heretic*. Thus they laboured to blacken the character of a man who was, perhaps, too eminent and popular to be executed ostensibly for his religion: but, when hung up by a chain around his waist, he endured the flames with a fortitude and joy which proclaimed a mind rich in the approbation of heaven, and in the prospect of eternal glory.

The council of Constance, which burned John Huss, condemned Wickliffe as a heretic; and by its order his bones were dug up and burnt, and the ashes thrown into a neighbouring brook. In this act they displayed the fury of the dragon, rather than the craft of the serpent; for it served only to give to Wickliffe, and his opinions, the publicity which truth ever seeks, but which, though frequently dangerous

* Warner's Ecc. Hist. part I. p. 506. Fuller.

to its disciples, was now perfectly safe for our reformer. Had they burned the first copies of his bible, they might have left his bones to rest in peace. Now from time to time new fires were kindled, and martyrs sealed the truth with their blood. The name of one of them, which was Goose, afforded merriment to his enemies, who were, probably, glad of this opportunity to keep the people in good humour with these sickening spectacles, by jesting with innocent blood.

In Scotland, James Retby was burnt at Glasgow, for denying that the pope was Christ's vicar. Paul Craw, a Bohemian, suffered the same fate at St. Andrews; his enemies putting a ball of brass into his mouth, to prevent his addressing the spectators. Thirty persons were, at one time, cited before the archbishop of Glasgow as Lollards: but Adam Reid, who was one of them, accomplished by bold raillery what more serious arguments could not have effected, for he so turned the laugh upon the prelate that they all escaped*.

Buckinghamshire is most famous among the counties of England for the number of its martyrs, who braved the terrors of death with heroic fortitude. At Amersham, where the lovers of Christ and the Bible held their most numerous meetings, one Tylsworth was burnt, and his daughter compelled to set fire to the pile on which her father offered up his life, in obedience to him, "who gave himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." Several escaped out of the kingdom, and were celebrated on the continent for their useful labours and

* Gillies' Historical Collections, vol. I. p. 44. Petrie Church Hist. 563.

patient sufferings. Many were branded on the cheek with the mark of a heretic, and those who recanted, were compelled to wear the mark of a faggot on their sleeve, to indicate that they were brands plucked out of the fire: happy would it have been for them to have borne this mark, in the scriptural sense, though their bodies had then been committed, without mercy, to the flames*!

Henry the fourth ascended the throne at the commencement of the sixteenth century. Viewing the confessors of the truth as obstinate rebels, who dared to think for themselves, or precise puritans, whose strictness condemned his own licentious manners, he felt towards them all the hatred which such men and such principles will ever kindle in the breasts of the wicked. When Luther arose in Saxony, the art of printing had afforded such facilities for the communication of sentiment, that England was affected by his attack on popery; and our youthful monarch, vain of his scholastic learning, was unwise enough to meet the reformer in the field of letters, where talents alone, and not titles, win the laurels. Luther treated his royal antagonist with sarcastic contempt, contending that truth and science know no difference between the prince and the plebeian. The pope, however, craftily flattered the vanity of the royal author, by rewarding him with the title of defender of the faith, which Henry was weak enough to value as the brightest jewel in his crown†.

* Fuller, book V. page 164.

† It has been said, that the jester which Henry, according to the fashion of the times, retained at court, seeing the king overjoyed, asked the reason; and when told, that it was because his holiness had conferred this new title, he replied, my good Harry, let thee and me defend each other, and let the faith alone to defend itself,

Before we relate the change of scene which shortly took place, it may be proper to record with honour the name of John Collet, dean of St. Paul's, and founder of its school; who, by expounding the epistles of Paul, and establishing a divinity lecture in his church, three days in a week, prepared the way for the reformation. Though he may, perhaps, be called a papist, he condemned many of the reigning corruptions in the church, and gave so good evidence of being a Christian that he was accused as a heretic, but by royal protection he was suffered to die in peace, in the year one thousand five hundred and nineteen, and in the fifty-third year of his age*.

We are now forcibly reminded of the just remark that, in many of the happiest changes which the world has seen, the worst of men have, through the sovereign influence of a mysterious providence, been the unconscious instruments of accomplishing the kind and holy designs of heaven. For where has this been more conspicuous, than in the reformation of England from Popery? And where has so much sin been turned to such happy consequences as in the quarrel between Henry the eighth and the Pope? Cardinal Wolsey indeed, though himself a haughty prelate, broke the ice, and contributed to the overthrow of the papal power in England. In the plenitude of his authority he seized upon many of the smaller monasteries to build the splendid college of Christ Church, Oxford. When the holy church had led the way, how could it be expected, that the state

If this was spoken as a serious joke, the fool was the wisest man of his day, for no party had yet learned the wisdom of leaving truth to support and propagate itself by its own inherent vigour.

* Petrie, 31, Fuller, book V. page 167.

would hesitate to follow, and lay its profane hands on treasures so tempting? Mortified, too, at missing St. Peter's chair, the cardinal sought to wreak his vengeance on the emperor Charles the fourth, to whom he attributed his disappointment. He therefore helped the king's confessor to fill the royal conscience with scruples of the legality of his marriage with Catherine of Spain, the emperor's aunt. Henry applied to the pope to declare the marriage null; but as the pontiff dared not disoblige the emperor, he artfully contrived delays, which ill suited the king's violent passions.

In the midst of these embarrassments, Cranmer was introduced at court, as the man who could cut the knot, which Rome sought rather to entangle than untie. He declared the marriage null by the word of God, and advised to consult the universities of Europe, which generally concurred in an answer agreeable to the king's wishes. Henry immediately married Anne Boleyn, and as the pope commanded him to take back his former wife, he seized the favourable moment, at once to revenge and enrich himself, by renouncing all connexion with Rome, and declaring himself supreme head of the Church in England. From this time he acted the pope to perfection, allowed as much reformation as he pleased, and laid all his subjects on the bed of Procrustus. Some he stretched, as too short for the extent of the monarch's faith; and others he decapitated for presuming to look over his shoulders. Protestants and papists equally fell victims to his ecclesiastical tyranny. Those who knew and loved pure religion, must have condemned, in their hearts, the licentiousness and crimes of Henry; and from

what we have seen of Wickliffe's sentiments we may conclude, that his followers could not approve the title of head of the church, which the prince assumed. The mischiefs which that title afterwards produced, show that the god of this world, when expelled from the strong hold of popery, early provided himself with a retreat, in which he might repeat his former hostilities under new colours.

Nor was the liberty of reading the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue, though the most favourite claim of Wickliffe and of all the reformers, by any means universally granted. William Tyndale, who had early imbibed the sentiments of Luther, finding that he could not execute his project safely in England, retired to Germany to translate the Scriptures, which he completed in the year one thousand five hundred and twenty-seven*.

The six articles, more truly denominated the bloody bill, were now published, establishing what

* The first edition was partly bought up at Antwerp by Bishop Tonestal, with no good intent; but Tyndale availed himself of the bishop's bigotry to get rid of an incorrect work, and to obtain funds for printing a superior edition; so that he who burned the former, was laughed at as a principal contributor to the expenses of the next edition. The new edition was so eagerly bought and read, that the bishops were alarmed, and obtained a royal proclamation to prohibit men from buying or reading such translations†. The clergy, however, wreaked their vengeance on the holy man, by causing him to be strangled and burnt near Antwerp: when tied to the stake, he cried, with a loud voice, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." His translation was afterwards, with some alterations and additions, allowed in England by the influence of Cranmer, who was now rewarded for his services to the king by the see of Canterbury. But women, and the inferior orders of society, were still forbidden to read the sacred volume.

† Petrie, 169

scarcely deserved the title which Fuller gives it of a twilight religion*. For transubstantiation, purgatory, the celibacy of priests, and the necessity of auricular confession, were decreed by the head of the church, and the defender of the faith. Lord Cromwell, who had been the bulwark of the reformation, was sacrificed to the capricious tyranny of Henry; and Cranmer had too much of the courtier to do all he might, with too little of the politician, to see through the artifices of the popish bishops, who contrived to prevent him from doing what he otherwise wished. At one time, half a dozen papists and protestants were executed together: these were burnt for believing too little, and those were hung for believing too much. Fisher, bishop of Rochester, and Chancellor More, died for popery: and whatever we may think of their creed, we must award them the high praise of martyrs for conscience. But Mrs. Askew and others suffered so severely for their zeal, in dispersing the English Bible, when it was forbidden by the capricious monarch, that many may now fear to meet them, when, at the last day, they shall rise up in judgment against those who treat with contemptuous neglect that precious volume, for which they shed their blood.

At length, when the reformation was again yielding to popery, Henry closed a reign of lust and cruelty by a death which awakened neither respect nor regret in the breasts of any; for he was excommunicated and cursed by the papists, to whose cause he had given a deadly stab; and by the protestants he was condemned for ordering masses to be said for the repose of his soul†. No communion covets the

* Book V. page 213.

† Fuller, book V. page 254.

honour of his name ; and while the Christian regards his religion as the mere offspring of his passions and his pride, the civil historian pronounces him one of the greatest tyrants who ever occupied the British throne.

Edward the sixth succeeded to the throne at nine years of age ; and the Lord Protector Seymour, with Cranmer, ruled the nation in his name. My lord of Canterbury now ventured to avow himself more entirely a protestant, and the exiles of that persuasion returned to their country. Peter Martyr, Bucer, Fagius, and Ochinus, some of the most celebrated protestant divines of the continent, were invited to take professorships in our universities. The king's injunctions were published, ordering every parish to be provided with the English Bible, and every minister to procure the New Testament in Latin and English, with the Paraphrase of Erasmus. Preachers also were appointed to make their circuits through the kingdom, explaining the Scriptures, and publishing the doctrines of the Gospel, while, besides an English liturgy, which contained a large portion of the sacred Scriptures, a new book of homilies was published by authority, in addition to the one sent forth by Henry the eighth. While these volumes of homilies were designed to help the clergy, who could not provide sermons for themselves, they have been thought to have introduced a custom, for which our country is singular, that of lazily substituting reading, instead of preaching.

The means which the reformers employed to rescue the nation from popery were not all unexceptionable. It might be necessary to publish the book of common prayer and administration of the sacraments ; but though it was never laid before the con-

vocation, and the popish bishops opposed it, the council enforced its use by severe pains and penalties. Thus, while some leading divines were grieved at a book, which appeared to them to retain much popish idolatry, others were punished with severity, for objecting to what they thought a new and heretical religion.

The mass of the people were mad after the wakes, processions, and holidays of which they were deprived by the book of common prayer; and the priests, not content with inflaming them by their discourses in the pulpit, roused them to arms in defence of the church of Rome. In Devonshire and Norfolk some thousands rose to compel the government to deny them the use of the English prayer book and bible, as well as the sacramental cup. They were, however, easily subdued.

But while the reformers carried their measures with a high hand, their own remaining darkness and the temper of their enemies induced them to take steps unworthy of their cause. Latimer and Hooper possessed the largest portion of the spirit of their ministry, and laboured most diligently to diffuse the knowledge of the Gospel by faithfully discharging their prime duty, "to preach the word instant in season, and out of season." On the rest, even including Cranmer, we can bestow but small praise; for what must have been the spirit of the prelates, if, in those times of ignorance, when multitudes never enjoyed an opportunity of hearing a sermon, it was necessary to compel the bishops to preach at least four times a year. Or what regard could Cranmer and Ridley have felt for the immortal interests of their countrymen, when they silenced Hooper, the most laborious and popular preacher of the day, and in spite of the

king's command refused to consecrate him to a bishoprick, unless he would, against his conscience, wear the popish habits*? It was even said, that they had formed designs against his life, if they had not succeeded in bowing him to their will.

This was the first symptom of the separation which afterwards took place among the reformed in England; for it now appeared, that there were some who wished to make the church of England the half-way house of the reformation, while others were for going all the lengths to which the Scriptures might lead. Hence the latter party, who pleaded for a church more pure from all the corruptions of popery, were denominated puritans; when the act of uniformity was passed, in the reign of Charles the second, they were called non-conformists; and at the revolution they obtained, from the toleration act, the title of dissenters. Hooper, bishop of Gloucester, who was burnt alive as a martyr for the protestant religion under queen Mary. was the first puritan or dissenter.

Neither party, however, understood the rights of conscience, for the most rigid reformers, as well as the more lax, were desirous of crushing popery by other arms than those of truth. A commission was granted to the principal persons in administration, to search out all anabaptists, heretics, and other contemners of the new liturgy. With others found guilty, was Joan Boucher, called Joan of Kent. She was accused of holding some heretical opinions concerning the incarnation of Christ, and as she refused to submit to the archbishop's instructions, and adopt his creed, she was committed to the flames, although it is not improbable

* Warner Ecc. Hist. Vol. II. p. 280.

that her faith was as pure as Cranmers. Van Paris, a Dutchman, was afterwards burnt for being an Arian. Thus the reformers tore from their own brow the honours of martyrdom to bestow them on those whom they deemed the worst of heretics, and deprived themselves of all right to complain, when Mary and her popish bishops gave them the same measure which they had dealt to others.

Edward, having languished in a consumption, died at Greenwich, the sixth of July, fifteen hundred and fifty three, in the sixteenth year of his age, before he had reigned quite seven years. Thus the sovereign of the universe thought fit only to show this admirable prince to the world, and recall him before he was of age; so that we know not whether to rejoice that he did not live to sully a reputation so fair, or to regret that he was not allowed to accomplish the noble designs of reformation, which he is said to have conceived. For he was certainly checked in his progress by the prelates, who, though the professed friends of reform, trembled lest they should be stripped of their splendor and reduced to a more humiliating simplicity. Endued with an understanding superior to his years, and enriched with uncommon stores of learning, he might have adopted the language of another devout prince*.

“I have more understanding than the ancients, I am wiser than my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation.” When pressed by Cranmer to sign the warrant for burning alive Joan Boucher, he exclaimed, “what! will you send her quick to the devil?” And after all the plausible reasons assigned for the bloody deed, his unsophisticated judgment still revolted, so that, when he yielded, he burst into tears, and protested

* Warner p. 309.

that his tutor should answer for it before God, as in obedience to the bishop's precepts he submitted, contrary to his own views and inclinations*.

As the reformation of the English establishment was at its acme during the reign of Edward, and ever after retrograded rather than advanced, it may now be useful to attempt some estimate of its real value and extent. Compelled by regard to truth, we must confess, that the most active instruments in delivering the nation from popery, were not the men who entered most cordially into the true spirit of the reformation, or shared most largely in the inestimable blessings of the Gospel. Nor was this national conversion what it has been represented, the conversion of the whole nation†. The succeeding reign of Mary too clearly proved that it was little more than a change of political system. The mass of all ranks, the great and little vulgar, were either protestants, or papists, Lutherans or Calvinists, high church or low, as the reigning prince or his cabinet council happened to dictate to them their creed. And such will ever be the complexion of a national religion till the wish of Caligula be realized, and we see a whole nation with but one neck, a body animated with one soul.

The men of obscure name, who, in the reign of the last Henry studied the sacred Scripture, and followed its dictates at the hazard of their lives, doubtless rejoiced at the change of measures on the accession of Edward, and availed themselves of the religious opportunities it afforded, whatever they may have thought of the reality of the religion, and the purity of the motives of those who held the helm of state. The

* Warner's Ecc. Hist. vol. II. p. 278. Petrie. Fuller.

† Ibidem, p. 317.

reading of the Bible being rather enjoined than prohibited, the precious volumes would be multiplied, and those who imbibed evangelical sentiments, would labour to diffuse them among others by conversation, writing, and preaching. The Redeemer, whose providence afforded these favourable opportunities, accompanies such means with the grace of his Holy Spirit, so that the number of real Christians much increased. But we have no reason to think that the genuine disciples of Christ, who were before but a small proportion, were ever a majority of the nation. In many parishes, the ministers could not preach, in others they would not, and in not a few they were papists at heart, though they kept their livings in a protestant establishment.

While insurrections in favour of popery threatened the government, the stage, which is supported by gratifying the public taste be it ever so depraved, entertained the people by turning the new religion into ridicule. The sentiments, language, and manners of pious men will always admit of being so caricatured by an artful buffoon, as to afford high sport for the multitudes who seek their pleasures at a playhouse. As in the early days of Christianity, the *pagani*, or peasantry, inhabiting the villages, were the last to hear the Gospel, and thus gave the name of pagans to all who were not Christians; the rural part of our isle was, through all the reign of Edward, pagan. It may, indeed, be justly questioned whether some of our villages ever heard those truths of the Gospel, which are essential to salvation, since they have been inhabited by man!!! Certainly at no one time were the pure doctrines of the cross ever preached through all the land.

It is melancholy to see the prelates, who are most renowned as martyrs for the reformation, busied during this most favourable period, in persecuting those whom they called their reformed brethren, about habits and ceremonies, which they confessed to be popish, and occupied with a political conversion of the country, by royal mandates and visitations; when, as they might have foreseen that their time would be short, they should have filled the kingdom with the pure preaching of the Gospel, which might have at least rescued many immortal souls from guilty superstitions, and perhaps prevented the melancholy changes which Mary afterwards effected. But the prelates, intoxicated with supreme power, seem to have thought that men were made Christians by act of parliament.

On the accession of Mary, many of the reformers drank deep of the bitter cup of persecution, which they had been too ready to mingle for others. Cranmer having concurred in attempting to exclude the queen from the succession to the throne, gave her a plausible reason for wreaking on him the bloody revenge, which was sweet to her taste. If any part of his history decisively proves the reality of his religion, it is his death. But Latimer, who had never been recalled to his bishoprick during all the reign of Edward, when such bishops were peculiarly needed, lived the genuine successor of apostles, and died with the unsullied honours of Stephen, the proto martyr. Hooper, the first puritan, was next in excellence, but it is not our design to give the full history of this period, in which twenty-six clergymen, including five bishops, were burnt alive, and two hundred and eighty persons are reckoned to have died martyrs for the protestant faith.

It may perhaps be asked, why so small a proportion of the sufferers was found among the clergy, who, by their station and profession, should have appeared foremost in the ranks, and why so great a majority of the victims were people of the lower classes. The answer is, that not the new converts in the reign of Edward, but the original Wickliffites furnished the martyrs. The deaths of the protestants were, however, in the highest degree honourable to themselves, and their profession; for the fiery furnace evidently purified their spirits. Their lives were not thrown away, but the event proved that it was with a prophetic spirit one of them said, "the burning of our bodies will kindle a light, which by the grace of God, none of our enemies shall be able to extinguish." Though at first the careless multitude beheld with sufficient indifference these infernal tragedies, at length they grew sick of roasted men, and in the following reigns, the protestants improved these scenes to excite such a horror of popery, as no artifice or power could ever afterwards surmount*.

* Warner, vol II. p. 393.

SECTION II.

From the establishment of the Reformation, under Queen Elizabeth, to the Revolution.

ON her accession to the throne, Elizabeth pushed down with a touch the edifice which her sister Mary had laboured to cement with so much blood. The new queen, however, proved herself the genuine child of Henry, for she commenced by forbidding her subjects to be reformed sooner*, and closed with prohibiting them to reform farther than she chose. After deliberating several weeks, on new year's day, fifteen hundred and fifty-nine, the reading of king Edward's liturgy, with the epistles and Gospel in English was restored. The parliament, which met shortly after, gave to Elizabeth, by the act of supremacy, that authority in the church, which her father wrested from the pope, which she was too politic to undervalue. In this act was introduced a clause empowering her to erect a court, which afterwards became infamous to posterity by the name of the high commission, where not a jury of peers, but commissioners appointed by the crown, took cognisance of the religion of Britons†. As all ecclesiastical persons were obliged to swear to her majesty's supremacy, the conscientious papists were reduced to the necessity of abandoning their situations in the establishment; but of some thousands, no more than two hundred and forty-three had sufficient regard for truth and conscience to make this costly sacrifice‡.

* Fuller, b. IX. p. 51.

† Warner, vol. II. p. 413.

‡ Neale's History of the Puritans, vol. I. 145. New edit,

Yet as these were in all probability, the best of the party, what can we think of those who retained their livings, and of the establishment which contained so many thousand weather-cocks, who after having been reconciled to the holy see under Mary, now relapsed again to protestantism at the beck of Elizabeth? To save appearances, the queen appointed a disputation with the papists, but they, perceiving what umpires would award the palm of victory, suddenly withdrew from the contest almost at its commencement.

A difference of sentiment now began to appear among the reformed themselves. When, during the persecutions of Mary's reign, many English exiles fled to the protestant countries on the continent, a church of these exiles was formed at Frankfort, who availed themselves of the opportunity to carry the reformation further than the British court had hitherto allowed. They abandoned the surplice and the responses of the English liturgy, and chose for their pastor the celebrated John Knox. But when a fresh party of refugees arrived from England, Dr. Cox, who had been tutor to king Edward, offended to see the liturgy, which he had helped to compose, rejected by his countrymen *, disturbed the worship by answering aloud after the minister: the following Lord's-day one of his partizans ascended the pulpit, and, without the consent of the congregation, read the English liturgy. When, not only the church and its pastor, but the magistrates of Frankfort, had protested against this imperious innovation, Dr. Cox resorted to the mean, ungenerous artifice of accusing Knox as an enemy to the emperor, because he had some years before, when he owed no allegiance to that prince,

* Heylin Hist. of Pres. 240.

said in one of his writings, what Dr. Cox himself would not have scrupled, that the emperor was as great an enemy to Christ as was Nero. Knox and his party being thus obliged to leave Frankfort, which was an imperial city, their opponents shortly after divided among themselves *. The differences, which thus commenced in exile, were kept alive, when the accession of Elizabeth invited the refugees to return to their native land.

King Edward's liturgy was revised by order of government, and though, to please Elizabeth, it was made less decidedly protestant †, and more palatable to the catholics, especially with regard to the real presence in the sacrament ‡, on the twenty-fourth of June, fifteen hundred and fifty-nine, it was established by law, in virtue of an "act for the uniformity of common prayer." A clause was inserted, empowering the queen to ordain further ceremonies and rites, and but for this reserve of power to herself, she told archbishop Parker she would not have passed the act. This statute of uniformity, rigidly enforced, kept the church of England in a state of convulsion for near a century, and defiled her with the foulest stain which can disgrace a religious body, the blood of dissentients.

The English establishment was now settled upon nearly its present form, but there was a considerable portion of the protestant ministers who officiated in the church without approving of its regulations. The surplice, cope, and other vestments of the church of Rome, which Edward had rejected, and Elizabeth recalled, were offensive to many. Hence those who wished to see the church more pure from the relicks

* Fuller, b. VIII. p. 30. † Warner, vol. II. p. 417.

‡ Heylin's History of the Reformation, p. 283.

of the ancient superstition, now first received the name of puritans ; which Fuller observes, “ can hardly be a title of reproach in the esteem of those who profess to follow the minister with a *pure* heart and humble voice *.” The majority of the puritans only wished to abstain from what their consciences disapproved, but others reviled the Romish garments and rites with all the rudeness of the times.

Elizabeth, watching for the church of which she was the supreme head, published fifty-three injunctions to her loving subjects, ordaining that priests and deacons shall not marry without leave of the bishop and two justices of the peace, nor shall bishops marry without allowance of their metropolitan and the queen’s comissioners, nor shall any keep abused images or pictures in their houses. What a specimen of the liberty of the times, when a man dared not marry as he pleased, nor keep what pictures he chose in his own house ! But as Elizabeth affected to glory in the title of the virgin queen, it was with the utmost difficulty she could be brought to endure married clergy†. Private and family prayers were discouraged; that all worship might be performed within the consecrated walls of the church, where her majesty moulded every thing to her will.

The convocation, in the year one thousand five hundred and sixty-two, considered the propriety of some further reformation in the establishment ; and had it not been for the votes of some absentees who could not hear the arguments, the puritans might have been relieved from those superstitions, which were a burden to their consciences‡. Failing in these

* Fuller, book IX. p. 76. † Warner, vol. II. p. 426,

‡ Warner, vol. II. p. 429.

attempts, and hating to see themselves so much like popish priests, the puritan clergy took the liberty to officiate frequently without the appointed habits. But as this contempt of her ecclesiastical supremacy was an unpardonable sin in the eyes of the queen, the London clergy were summoned to appear before the ecclesiastical commission. The bishop's chancellor thus addressed them: "My masters, and ye ministers of London, the council's pleasure is, that ye strictly keep the unity of apparel like this man (pointing to a Mr. Cole in full uniform), with a square cap, a scholar's gown priest-like, a tippet, and, in the church, a linen surplice. Ye that will subscribe, write *volo*, those who will not, write *nolo*." On attempting to speak, they were commanded to hold their peace, and while sixty-one out of a hundred subscribed, acknowledging that it wounded their consciences, thirty-seven chose rather to starve*. They gave in a paper containing their reasons, which as long as it is extant, will furnish a memorial highly honourable to their good sense, learning, mildness, liberality, and sacred regard to the will of God †.

But, regardless of all reasons, archbishop Parker and the ecclesiastical commission, obliged every one who had cure of souls, to swear obedience to all the queen's injunctions; to all letters from the lords of the privy council; to the injunctions of their metropolitans; to the mandates of their bishop, archdeacons, chancellors, somners, and receivers; and to be subject to the controul of all their superiours with patience. By

* Warner, vol. II. p. 434.

† Neale, vol. I. p. 189. Pierce's Vindication of the Dissenters, p. 57.

such oaths, Parker drove the conscientious puritans from the establishment*.

At length a fourth part of the ministers were suspended as puritans; among whom were the principal preachers, at a time when not one minister in six could compose a sermon. Many of the churches were shut up, especially in London†, and frequently when the congregation was assembled, the minister was forbidden to preach by the bishop's spies, who were sent to see that the clergy strictly conformed. This inflamed the hatred of the people against the habits and ceremonies which they before despised; so that the populace demolished crucifixes, monuments, and painted windows, pouring contempt upon those who wore the habits, as they were, indeed, frequently despicable for their ignorance and vices. Some of the bishops complained that they were treated as dogs, and were afraid to go abroad, lest they should be stoned by the mob.

But others, especially Grindall, bishop of London, detested the spirit and conduct of the court party, and showed the puritans all the favour which the times would allow‡. The university of Cambridge displayed the same liberality§ for which it has been since distinguished, by exercising its peculiar privilege, to authorise ministers to preach throughout England without licenses from any of the bishops. Thus many of the deprived ministers, who sincerely loved their work, and thirsted to diffuse the knowledge of Christ, travelled through the country, and preached wherever they could find access to a pulpit.

* Warner, vol. II. p. 435. † Ibidem. ‡ Ibidem.

§ Warner, vol. II. p. 436.

In the year fifteen hundred and sixty-seven, a separate congregation was discovered in London, which seems to have been first formed at a much earlier period. During the fiery persecution of Mary, some protestants had determined to keep themselves pure from the papal communion, by abstaining from the established worship, and meeting together as a church, whenever they could with safety. Finding, on the accession of Elizabeth, that the mass of the clergy were the same who had before conformed to popery, many of whom were stained with the blood of the martyrs, while those who wished for the most complete reformation were expelled and persecuted; they abstained from the communion of such an establishment, and continued to worship as a separate body.

A meeting of a hundred persons in the plumber's hall was discovered, and ten of them, being brought before the bishop, were roughly treated*. Every day widened the breach. Mr. Cartwright of Cambridge, the most elegant Latin writer among the puritans, presented to the parliament an admonition, pleading for further reformation. This produced a controversy between him and Whitgift†, which exalted the advocate for high church to the see of Canterbury, and drove Cartwright into exile.

The puritans perceiving that, although the parliament, especially in the lower house, was favourable to their cause, there were no hopes of escaping the tyrannical impositions of the queen and her bishops, came to this resolution, "that it was their duty, in

* Pierce, p. 63—5.

† Heylin's Hist. of Presbyterians, 262. Fuller, book IX. p. 103. Pierce, p. 86.

the present circumstances, to separate from the public churches, and to meet in private houses, or elsewhere, to worship God according to their conscience*." They formed a presbytery at Wandsworth, near London, composed of several ministers and gentlemen; and though, at first, some of them objected only to the habits of the clergy, and to parts of the liturgy, while others condemned the whole fabric of the hierarchy; at length, the two streams uniting, says Fuller, "nonconformity bore a large channel in the city of London†." As the Presbyterians insisted that their discipline was of divine institution, the prelates, to be even with them, now began to maintain, that episcopacy was not merely a provision of the state, but an ordinance of God, derived from the apostles‡.

About this period, however, arose a new species of puritans, the Brownists, or Independents, who were still more obnoxious to the ruling party than their predecessors, as they were charged with denying, not only the divine right of episcopacy, but even the claims of the establishment to the title of a true church. As their history will occur in the further progress of the work, we proceed to relate another event, which proves Elizabeth rather the daughter of Henry than the sister of Edward. Some Dutch anabaptists were convicted of heresy, and condemned to the flames; and though Fox, the martyrologist, wrote to the queen a persuasive letter in elegant Latin§, she steeled her heart against the voice of

* Warner, vol. II. p. 456.

† Fuller, book IX. p. 103.

‡ Warner, vol. II. p. 488.

§ To record the intercession of this genuine disciple of Christ in behalf of men, whose principles he condemned, is an honour

mercy, and in defiance of the tenderness of her sex, and the benevolence of the religion she professed, burnt them alive in Smithfield.

Towards the puritans also she grew more severe. From serious argument, the two parties recurred to

due to his memory. "I understand," says he, "there are some foreigners in England condemned for heretical doctrines, and one or two of them doomed, unless reserved by your clemency, shortly to be burnt. In which I perceive two things to be noticed, the wickedness of their error, and the severity of their punishment. Their error indeed, no sound mind can defend; for I wonder how such monstrous opinions could enter the mind of any Christian. Yet such is the infirmity of human nature, that if divine light be at all withdrawn, into what absurdities do we not rush? I think such errors should by no means be encouraged, but suppressed by suitable restraints. Yet to burn alive the bodies of the miserable creatures with fire and flames, pitch and sulphur, because they have erred, rather by the darkness of their understanding than the impiety of their passions, seems cruelty, more after the example of Rome than the practice of the Gospel; and unless it had originated with Innocent the third, and the spirit of the popes, this brazen bull had never been introduced into the merciful church of Christ. Though I am not pleased with the criminals, nor their errors, yet, as I am a man, I favour the life of men, not that they may be allowed to err, but may have opportunity to repent. I would even spare the brute creation, and never see them slaughtered without uneasiness, and admiring the mercy of God, that, when he ordered them to be sacrificed, he commanded their blood to be poured out at the foot of the altar, that they might not be tortured by being burnt alive. Allow me, therefore, to intreat your majesty to spare the life of these persons if you can (and what cannot your authority in these cases effect), or at least let their punishment be changed. Might they not be imprisoned, banished, or even hung: but I beseech you, suffer not the long extinguished fires of Smithfield to be again re-kindled. But if that cannot be obtained, I appeal to the compassions of your breast, by every consideration to spare them at least a month or two, that God may recover them from their dangerous errors, lest with the destruction of their bodies their souls also go to eternal perdition." Fuller, book IX. p. 104.

satirical pamphlets, of which those signed Martin Mar Prelate were the most keen, and drew forth the greatest number of replies. Perceiving that the spirit of religion suffered by such hostilities, the respectable puritans condemned this mode of defence. The queen's officers made strict search for the private presses at which these satires were printed, but as they were moved from one town and county to another, they were not easily discovered. The most iniquitous laws were enacted against the liberty of the press; and though the rights of Englishmen were invaded by servile parliaments, frightened by the imperious threats of a woman, yet the severities of the bishops against the puritans outraged all law and equity*. A statute was passed in the thirty-fifth year of Elizabeth for the punishment of persons obstinately refusing to come to church, which, after three months imprisonment, banishes those who will not conform, and sentences them to death if they escape from banishment. And yet the author of the Confessional, says that Pierce, has fully proved that the bishops out-ran the laws in their severities towards the puritans. At length the dominant party seized the opportunity of drinking the blood of their enemies, for which they had long thirsted. Several puritans were executed† and though Elizabeth appeared to feel some compunction, when she learned that they died, solemnly declaring their loyalty, and praying for the life and government of the queen; we ask, where is the reformation, which is the essential evidence of repentance?

* Warner, vol. II. p. 442.

† Fuller, book IX. p. 169. Pierce's Vindication of Dissenters, p. 145—7.

In addition to the contest concerning the popish habits, the puritans also suffered for differing from the ruling party concerning several doctrines. They denied that Christ descended locally into hell, which the bishops maintained; though, at the present day, even bishops themselves will own that these confessors suffered for being wiser than their contemporaries, and understanding the original language of the Scriptures better than their superiors. They were also persecuted for maintaining the morality of the Christian Sabbath* at a time when all serious persons will own that it needed some advocate, for several lives were lost at a bear-baiting on the Lord's-day, near London. Towards the latter end of this reign, the puritans maintained the ancient doctrines of the reformation against the high church party, who were verging fast towards arminianism.

As the reformation of Scotland was effected by means of presbyterian divines, who formed an establishment suited to their own views, though it happened during this period, its history will be included in that of the presbyterians. We turn to inquire after the state of real religion, amidst all these contentions for forms and doctrines. The mass of the clergy were below contempt. In ten thousand parishes there were but a few hundred preachers. A petition presented to parliament complained that, to fill up the places of the expelled puritans, the bishops made priests of the basest of the people; not so much for their occupations,

* This will hardly be imputed to them as a fault by those who, on hearing the command, "remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy;" utter response in the liturgy, "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law."

though they were shoe-makers, barbers, shepherds, and horse-keepers, as for their vices. In a survey of different counties, a large proportion of the clergy are marked as drunkards, dicers, and burnt in the hand for felony. Bishop Sandys observes, that "many people could not hear a sermon for seven years; and while they perished for lack of knowledge, their blood would lie at somebody's door."

Yet amidst this dearth of instruction, when England was fast returning to Rome, Elizabeth prohibited the "prophecying" of the clergy, for which archbishop Grindall pleaded in a manner honourable to his memory, though to the loss of his credit at court*. To go to a place of worship twice on a Lord's-day, and spend the evening in domestic worship and instruction, was the mark of a puritan; and, indeed, among them real religion took refuge; though we cannot hope that they were all pure in heart. Their zeal against the ceremonies and habits was not all holy fire kindled at the altar of God; yet, when we view the melancholy compound of the hateful with the contemptible, which appeared in the profane bishops†, we cannot wonder that the victims of their tyranny should sometimes hurl on them the indignities which they deserved.

At length Elizabeth departed, to give an account of her administration at a higher tribunal. Warner has justly pronounced her a tyrant, who violated the laws by which she held her crown‡. That the tenderness of her sex had no place in her breast, the cruelties she exercised, the blood she shed, too clearly prove. When she first jested at signing the

* Fuller, book II. p. 123. Warner, vol. II. p. 448.

† Pierce, p. 97.

‡ Warner, vol. II. p. 247.

warrant for the execution of Mary queen of Scots, and afterwards mourned most tragically for the death of the unhappy princess, her laughter and her tears were alike profane and detestable*. As to her religion, she abjured nothing in popery but submission to a higher authority than her own, and was no farther a protestant than was necessary to make herself a pope. She had images, a crucifix, and lighted candles, in her own chapel; and when her chaplain preached against the sign of the cross, she called out to him to desist from that ungodly digression, and to go on with his text. An enemy to preaching, she scarcely ever heard a sermon, and used to say, one or two preachers in a county were enough. The exercises which were most calculated to form a useful ministry she suppressed, and broke the heart of Grindall, the best primate that England has known†. That such an idolator of her own prerogative should hate puritans was natural; for they were not the courtly men who could join the priests of the day to call her goddess. A life spent in defiance of the genuine spirit of religion was closed without its consolations; while the gloom which hung over her later days‡ was aggravated by seeing her courtiers turn to worship James, the rising sun: she expired the twenty-fourth of March, sixteen hundred and three, in the seventieth year of her age, and forty-fifth of her reign.

As the successor of Elizabeth was James, king of Scotland, educated in presbyterian principles, the English prelates dreaded what they called the Scotch mist. Nor was it without reason; for to the pres-

‡ Robertson's History of Scotland, vol. II. p. 168—178.

* Warner, vol. II. p. 447.

† Robertson's Hist. of Scotland, vol. II. p. 284.

byterians of Scotland he had said, "I thank God that I am king of the sincerest kirk in the world ; sincerer than the kirk of England, whose service is an ill-said mass in English : it wants nothing of the mass but the liftings," meaning the elevation of the host*. At the same time he had laid up, deep in his heart, a hatred for the presbyterian establishment, which had offended his majesty, as he owned on his arrival in England, by presuming to contradict him to his face, and attempting to reduce him, together with the whole nation, to obedience to their discipline. While he was making these hypocritical professions, he was carrying on a correspondence with the English nobles and bishops, and promising to continue the liturgy, which he derided as an ill-said mass†. For queen Elizabeth and her courtiers had seen through this shallow monarch, and discovered, as Burnet says‡, that he was either inclined to turn papist, or to be of no religion ; or, according to Warner, that he had no other religion than what flowed from a principle, which he called kingcraft.

On his entrance into this land of promise, as he termed it, the puritans met him by the way, and presented to him a petition, called the Millenary, as it professed to convey the wishes of a thousand ministers for further reformation. The universities, alarmed at these applications, opposed them by an angry reply, and a threatening decree. Cartwright, the famous literary champion, presented to James a Latin commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes, gratefully acknowledging his obligations to his ma-

* Calderwood, p. 286. Robertson, vol. II. p. 204—8.

† Burnet's History of his Own Times, vol. I. p. 7, 8.

‡ Ibid.

jesty, who had formerly nominated him to the divinity chair in the university of St. Andrews.

But to get rid of his old friends with a good grace, and display to advantage his skill in theological disputation, on which he piqued himself; James appointed a conference between the high church party and the puritans, to be held at Hampton Court. The disputants on both sides were nominated by the king, of course, with the advice of his *privy* council. For the establishment there were eight bishops, and as many deans; to whom we may add the king, and the lords of his council. The puritans had only four advocates. However unfair this disproportion may appear, was it not a high compliment to these champions, or their cause, to match them against such a host? For who would raise an army to break a fly upon the wheel? The account of the conference was published by Dr. Barlow, dean of Chester, who was one of the advocates for the establishment; and though the puritans accused him of gross misrepresentation, which he is said to have confessed in his last moments, we need no other document to prove that it was "a ridiculous farce, compounded of kingcraft and priestcraft, in which the actors forgot nothing but their masks." James, instead of acting as dignified moderator, was greedy to become a party, to prove that he called the conference only to please the bishops, by browbeating the puritans. The advocates for things, as they were, showed plainly enough that they were in the secret, and behaved like men, who were not called to produce their reasons, but to display their authority. Regardless of the apostolic canon, that a bishop should not be soon angry, Bancroft flew into a passion with Dr.

Reynolds, divinity professor at Oxford, the principal advocate for the puritans, and protested that a schismatick ought not to be allowed to speak against his bishop. While Sir Edward Peyton confessed that the puritans, not having liberty of speech, saw that they might as well be silent, the bishops were in raptures with their king, and declared, that, for learning and piety, he was the Solomon of his age. Bancroft, bishop of London, falling down on his knees, said, "my heart melteth for joy, that almighty God, of his singular mercy, hath given us such a king, as, since Christ's time, the like hath not been." His grace of Canterbury, charmed with the wisdom of this Solomon, exclaimed, "undoubtedly your majesty speaks by the special assistance of the Spirit of God." The head which wore the crown was too weak to bear the intoxicating fumes of such fragrant incense; and as the puritans were no match for the bishops in tossing the censer with courtly air, James ended the conference, by declaring that he would make them conform, or hurry them out of the land, or do worse*.

Other writers have given a different colouring to some parts of this scene, affirming that, on one of the days of debate, the king himself played the puritan to such lengths, that the bishops, on their knees, entreated him not to alter any thing, lest it should be thought they had unjustly persecuted men for non-conformity. It is evident, however, that the convocation, which met this year, were well assured of his majesty's favour, for they ventured to publish a hundred and forty-one canons, which were afterwards ratified by his letters patent; but not being

* Warner and Fuller.

sanctioned by parliament they bind only the clergy. Bancroft, exalted to the see of Canterbury, persecuted the puritans with such fury, that a contemporary writer has observed, in this year three hundred ministers were suspended, deprived, excommunicated, imprisoned, or forced to leave the country. Mr. Parker having published a treatise against the sign of the cross in baptism, was answered by a royal proclamation, offering a reward for his apprehension.

But with all the injury which the puritans suffered from the conference at Hampton Court, they have the honour of procuring there the new translation of the Bible, which is in present use. When Dr. Reynolds, in the name of his brethren, requested that this work might be undertaken, as the Bibles then extant were not according to the original; the bishop of London replied, "if every man's humour were followed, there would be no end of translating." The king, however, approving of the proposal, a committee of divines was appointed to undertake the work. The instructions given to them were wise and good; and indeed almost all the wisdom which James ever displayed, centred in this affair. There were too many learned puritans on the watch to allow of unfair liberties with the translation; so that, when it appeared, there were but few marks of a sectarian spirit*.

King James bent all his authority to bring his

* The words church, bishop, easter, and infidel, are managed with some art; though it is rather curious, that to make the apostles bishops a bishoprick is given to Judas Iscariot‡, and to gain the name of church to a building, it is applied to idolatrous temples§, in a way that no unbiassed scholar would have translated the original words.

‡ Acts, i. 20.

§ Acts, xix. 37.

mother-kirk, which he had declared the purest in the world, to adopt what he had before called popish, or anglicane episcopacy. Returning from his tour to Scotland, he was grieved to see his English subjects given to the puritanic sin of keeping the Sabbath too strictly, so that to make them more merrily religious, he published a declaration to encourage sports on the Lord's-day; though he had before ratified the articles of the church of Ireland, in which the morality of the Sabbath is asserted. The declaration for Sunday sports was drawn up by bishop Moreton, and recommends dancing, archery, leaping, vaulting, may-games, whitsun ales, morrice dances, setting up may-poles, and carrying rushes into the churches*.

Ireland, however, received some benefits during this reign. The colonies of Scotch presbyterians, which settled in that country, carried with them a large portion of knowledge and religion; and the venerable Usher diffused a spirit of piety and moderation which formed a striking contrast to the violence and bigotry of the prelates in the other parts of the empire.

The famous gunpowder-plot, which rendered the papists odious to the nation at large, only frightened James into lenity towards the priests, and offers for reconciliation with Rome by meeting half way†. As this project had no charms for any but himself, the parliament often pressed him to execute the laws against papists; and on one occasion, presented to him a list of fifty-seven popish lords and knights, who were in the principal offices of government‡. Because the principles of the calvinistic puritans were

* Fuller, b. X. p. 74. † Warner, vol. II. p. 486. ‡ Ibid, 506.

thought peculiarly opposed to popery, the court began to cherish arminianism, and now Laud, of infamous memory, was made bishop of St. David's*. The king being at the same time engaged in disputes with his parliaments, who refused to submit to his prerogative as paramount to all law, those members who maintained, with most zeal, the rights and liberties of Britons were branded with the name of state puritans. These may be considered as the first whigs, the fathers of that party in the legislature which has ever since espoused the popular branch of our constitution, in opposition to those who would render the prerogative or influence of the crown absolute.

A preacher at Oxford having maintained in his sermon the right of the people to resist a tyrannical king, the university passed a decree, "that it is not lawful for subjects to appear in arms against their king, on the score of religion, or on any other account." "But to bind the nation down for ever to such slavish principles," says Warner, "all the graduates were obliged to swear, 'that they will always continue of the same opinion.' Was there ever so unreasonable and so absurd an oath devised†?" It seems to have been the determined resolution of archbishop Bancroft to crush at once the religion of the puritans, and the liberties of the nation‡.

While secretly conniving at popery, in defiance of the most solemn protestations to his parliament, and fostering that religion to the serious terror of his subjects; while giving vogue to the new doctrines of arminianism, in opposition to his own education,

* Warner, vol. II. p. 504.

† Ibid, p. 503.

‡ Ibid, p. 493.

and the system of the English and Scotch churches; James yet pretended to be such a zealot for the ancient creed, that he burnt alive an arian whom he could not confute. Shortly after, another endured the same horrid fate. A third would have followed to the flames, but the deaths of the former having produced an impression on the public mind, contrary to what was intended, he was suffered to wait for death in the silence and gloom of a prison*.

But the supreme Governor of the world, watchful for our country, opposed some checks to the ruinous tendency of affairs. The furious Bancroft was succeeded in the see of Canterbury by Abbot, whose benevolent disposition adorned his ministry, while his generous attachment to the liberties of his country, endeared him to those who had not learned to bow to the yoke of unlimited prerogative. He had ever treated the puritans as mildly as he dared; and at length he openly opposed the court, by forbidding his clergy to read the declaration for Sunday sports, and by opposing the new theology of Laud and his party. But having had the unhappiness to kill a man, by accident, while hunting in the new forest of Hampshire, he retired from public life, and not suiting the court, he was in future neglected†.

Prince Henry, the eldest son of James, was snatched from the fond hopes of a nation, whose partiality for the virtuous, intelligent, and magnanimous youth, roused the jealous father to ask, "will you bury me alive‡?" But after his death, the king's daughter, Elizabeth, was married to the elector Palatine of the Rhine, from whom descended the illus-

* Fuller, book X. p. 64.

† Ibid,

‡ Warner, p. 498.

trious dynasty which now sways the British sceptre*. It would almost seem that the puritans had some prescience of the blessings which their successors, the modern dissenters, should enjoy under the house of Hanover; for no words can express the high satisfaction which they felt in the match, or the affliction they endured, when their favourite princes were driven from the throne of Bohemia and from the electorate, by the house of Austria. While James, who was courageous only to oppress the unresisting, rendered himself contemptible by the pusilanimous desertion of his daughter and her husband, the dissenters of that day urged their restoration to the throne by the arms of Britain, and promoted, with patriotic liberality, subscriptions for their relief and support †.

Contrary to the fears of pious men, the measures of James's reign were rather favourable than injurious to religion. Those who retained an attachment to calvinism, which was considered as the doctrine of the reformation, and those who were friends to the constitution, in opposition to the absolute power of the king, were thrown into one common mass, called puritans, who were, by the impolitic measures of James, daily becoming more numerous and popular. The independent gentlemen of the country received the persecuted puritans into their houses, as tutors to their children, by which was formed a generation, which, in the ensuing reign, maintained that struggle against tyranny, which overturned both the throne and the altar. The puritans, who fled from the cruelties of Bancroft, imitated the Christians, at the persecution,

* Warner, p. 498.

† Neale's History of the Puritans, vol. II. p. 94.

which arose about Stephen, by diffusing their principles to the ends of the earth. The sentiments of the presbyterians and independents, travelled with the exiles to the continent of America, and thus acquired an extension far beyond that of the church of England*.

At length James yielded to the king of terrors, not without strong suspicions of poison†. His character has appeared too evident for his fame. While under the wholesome discipline of the Scotch kirk, he was decent in his conduct, but when converted, to the English establishment, he abandoned himself to luxury and licentiousness. His language was obscene, and his actions very often lewd and indecent‡. He was both a swearer and a drunkard; but when he recovered from his intoxication, he wept like a child, and said, he hoped God would not impute to him his infirmities.

His deep-rooted hatred to a presbyterian church is no inexplicable mystery, when we read in the minutes of one of the assemblies at Edinburgh, that three ministers were sent to confer with his majesty on the following subjects: "that they are grieved to find that the reading of the word at his table, and the saying of grace before and after meat is omitted; that they request his majesty to resort to sermons on week-days; and that he would forbear to talk with others during the sermon; they recommend to his majesty privy meditations with God and his conscience, as he is blotted with swearing, and the courtiers imitate his example§." While the absurdity of at-

* Burnet's Own Times, vol. I. p. 17.

† Warner, vol. III. p. 507.

‡ Mosheim, cent. 17. sect. 1.

§ Burnet's History of his Own Times, p. 8.

tempting to drill a whole nation into the appearance of a Christian church, on which the presbyterians of the north were bent, became apparent by their success with his majesty and the court, Burnet owns, that they had peculiar reasons for treating James with jealous vigilance*. Indeed no enemy to his memory could wish him to appear in a worse light than that in which he is placed by this moderate prelate.

Charles the first succeeded to the ungrateful inheritance of contracted views, arbitrary principles, an exhausted treasury, and a dissatisfied people. His father had sharpened for him the fatal axe, of which he knew not how to avert the stroke. But as men love to worship the rising sun, it is no wonder that a prince of five and twenty, interesting in his appearance, ascended the throne with popular applause. He was at first thought to favour the puritans, as Dr. Preston, the head of that party, came up to London in the coach with him on his accession†; but this was soon proved to be a mistake, for he married a daughter of the king of France, a seducing papist, whose entrance into the kingdom, says bishop Kennet, was more fatal than the plague‡.

Differences early arose between the king and the parliament. Mr. Montague had, in the preceding reign, pretended to repel the attack of a popish priest; but in the opinion of all zealous protestants, his book had betrayed the church of England, and defended nothing but arminianism. This drew upon him the

* Petrie, p. 513.

† Burnet's Own Times, vol. I. p. 19.

‡ Neale, vol. II. p. 150.

censure of the indignant parliament, from whose sentence he appealed to Cæsar with so much effect, that though the legislature had pronounced him unworthy of the ministry, Charles raised him to a bishoprick*. The commons presented also to his majesty a petition against the papists, to which he gave such a reply, that nothing farther was wanting to gain the hearts of his subjects but sincere adherence to his fair promises; but he early showed that he regarded his professions, like a true son of James, only as a necessary piece of kingcraft†.

But the germ of all the mighty mischiefs of this reign was Laud, who was born at Reading, educated on a charitable foundation at Oxford, and after having halted between protestants and papists, was exalted to the see of Canterbury. He seemed to study how far he could go towards Rome, without being a papist; and how absolutely he could reign over kingdoms, without exchanging his mitre for a crown. At the coronation of Charles, he introduced some additional ceremonies, and said to his majesty, "as you see the clergy come nearer the altar than others, so remember that you give them greater honour." He would have forced his idol, arminianism, upon the convocation; but being better advised, he procured a private conference, which, like that at Hampton Court, was not designed to elicit truth, but to enforce the reigning creed; so that it was archly observed, no one returned thence an arminian who went thither a calvinist‡.

The king, finding his parliaments hostile to arminianism, popery, and arbitrary power, studied to

* Fuller, book II. p. 119. Warner, p. 510.

† Ibid, p. 513.

‡ 125, book II.

govern without them, and was only prevented by want of troops from throwing off the mask, and rendering himself absolute*. By various illegal acts, he extorted money from his subjects; and as the puritans were peculiarly hateful to the high priest who ruled the nation, they were fined in the star chamber, till many of them were reduced from affluence to beggary†. Preachers were employed by the court to exalt the king's prerogative, to the ruin of the constitution. Dr. Sibthorp, in an assize sermon, affirmed, that if princes command any thing, which the subjects may not perform, because it is against the laws of God or nature, or impossible, subjects are bound to undergo the punishments without resisting or reviling." The king was so pleased with this sermon, at which common sense revolts, that he ordered archbishop Abbot to licence it for the press; but he had too much honesty and religion to consent, for which he was banished to an unhealthy place. Warner says, "I shall make no remarks on this single instance of despotic arbitrary power, when the whole nation was treated as a conquered province‡."

The king imitated his father, both in publishing a royal declaration to encourage dancing, masks, and interludes on the Lord's day§, and in disgusting his Scotch subjects, by forcing upon them bishops, and a liturgy, which they dreaded more than the plague. In a visit to Scotland, Laud displayed all the foppery of Rome, on a stage where it was exposed only to

* Warner, vol. II. p. 515.

† As St. Pauls cathedral was repaired at this time, the fines were aggravated to meet the expense, which gave birth to the saying, the church was built with the sins of the people.

‡ Warner, p. 516.

§ Ibid, p. 525.

ridicule, and induced his majesty to enforce the new religion with severities, which added to that ridicule an **unconquerable** horror and detestation. Had this **ill-starred** favourite conceived the deadliest hatred to his master, and formed a settled determination to ruin him; he could not have pursued more effectual methods; for every step of his administration laid the train by which at last he blew up the throne of the Stuarts.

While all men of decency were shocked at the debaucheries which profaned the Sabbath, so that the judges, and all the justices of one of the most considerable counties, remonstrated against it; Laud insulted them for it as puritans; and chief justice Richardson* complained, with tears, that he had been miserably shaken by the archbishop, who had nearly choked him with his lawn sleeves.

It was now becoming every day more difficult, and less important, to distinguish between the church of England and that of Rome. Though it is not proved that Laud wished to re-unite the two churches, it is evident that he was even more compliant than James, who wished to meet half-way; for our protestant archbishop seemed mad after something like the Gallican church, which should possess all the splendor of popery, with the peculiar advantage of absolute submission to the bishops instead of the pope. The Lord's supper had been celebrated in the midst of the churches, at a table, which Laud now ordered to be removed, and placed as an altar against the east wall, fenced round with a rail to keep the profane laity at an awful distance. The people were solemnly instructed in the sacred

* Warner, p. 525.

duty of paying reverence, on entering and leaving the consecrated buildings ; of bowing to the altar, which Laud said was the only place on earth where God resided ; and of doing homage to the clergy, who were to be called priests.

The pompous ritual, which was now introduced, gave such encouragement to papists, that they abounded through the kingdom ; and when Laud asked the daughter of the earl of Devon why she turned catholic, she replied, "because I hate to travel in a crowd, and as I see you and your party making such haste towards Rome, I determined to go before you*." Dr. Cozens was accused, by the parliament, of setting up in the cathedral of Durham a marble altar with cherubim ; a cope with the Trinity, God the Father being represented as an old man ; and a crucifix with the image of Christ, who was adorned with a red beard and a blue cap. He was also charged with lighting up two hundred tapers at the altar, on Candlemas-day, and procuring a consecrated knife to cut the sacramental bread†.

But all who opposed these new beauties of holiness, were pursued with the utmost severity of Laud's vindictive spirit. Dr. Alexander Leighton, the father of the celebrated archbishop, was brought into the star chamber, for publishing an appeal to the parliament, or Zion's Plea, against Prelacy, and received a sentence so equitable, that when it was pronounced Laud pulled off his cap and gave God thanks. That we may justly appreciate his lordship's devotion, he

* Warner, p. 520.

† Mr. Smart, a prebend of the cathedral, was cruelly persecuted for preaching against these superstitions. Fuller, book II. p. 173.

has recorded in his diary, the sentence which raised his gratitude to heaven. "His ears were cut off, his nose slit, his face branded with burning irons; he was tied to a post, and whipped with a treble cord, of which every lash brought away his flesh. He was kept in the pillory near two hours, in frost and snow." He was then imprisoned, with peculiar severity, for about eleven years, and when released by the parliament, he could neither hear, nor see, nor walk*.

In the year one thousand six hundred and thirty-seven, a most infamous tragedy was acted in the treatment of a divine, a lawyer, and a physician, whose names were Burton, Prynne, and Bastwick. They had before been imprisoned for libels, but were now accused of publishing new reflections on the bishops, their innovations, and encouraging of Sunday revellings. Unable to procure counsel, and forbidden to plead their own cause, they were condemned to stand in the pillory, where their ears were cut off; and as Prynne had before suffered this indignity, the stumps of his ears were barbarously mangled†, by which, the temporal artery being cut, the blood flowed down in streams.

Who can wonder that our much-injured forefathers should now turn their eyes towards other lands, and address each other thus? "The sun shines as pleasantly on America as on England, and the Sun of Righteousness much more clearly. We are treated here in a manner which forfeits all claim upon our

* Pierce, p. 179.

† Fuller, book XI. p. 155. Who also records, that when Prynne was branded on the cheek with S. L. for slanderous libeller, he made the following distich:—

Stigmata maxillis referens, insignia Laudis,
Exultans remeo victima grata Deo.

affection. The church of England has added to the ceremonies and habits of popery, the only marks of anti-christ which were wanting, corruption of doctrine, and a bloody persecution of the saints. Let us remove whither the providence of God calls; and make that our country, which will afford us what is dearer than property or life, the liberty of worshipping God, in the way which appears to us most conducive to our eternal welfare*." In twelve years of Laud's administration, four thousand emigrants became planters in America; and Neale affirms, that he had a list of seventy-seven divines ordained in the church of England, who became pastors of emigrant churches in America, before the year one thousand six hundred and forty. These persecutions drained England of half a million of money, which was then an immense sum; and had the same infatuated councils continued, the fourth part of the moveable property of the country would, in a dozen years, have been transferred to America. For when it was found that the exiles could live in their new settlements, multitudes were eager to leave, as they said, the Egypt of bondage for the land of Goshen. But Laud and his party then forbade them to leave a country from which he had alienated their affections, a stretch of cruelty beyond that of Lewis the fourteenth, who allowed his protestant subjects time and opportunity to leave their native land.

We may, however, give the high church party credit for sincere repentance, if, as has been affirmed, the celebrated Hampden and Oliver Cromwell were, by this prohibition, obliged to remain in England against their will. For the king having proceeded

* Neale, vol. II. p. 207.

to imprison the members of parliament; many who were attached to the church of England cast their eyes towards America, as the asylum of civil liberty. But it is not our task to record the struggle between Charles and the parliament. Laud was brought to the block; episcopacy was abolished; an assembly of divines was called to meet at Westminster, by whom was framed a directory for worship, which superceded the prayer-book; and the Scot's army being called to the assistance of the parliament, presbytery was established, which would have been as intolerant as the episcopal church of England, had not the independents, with a singular union of courage, address, and good fortune, seized the sword of state.*

At length the unhappy Charles fell a victim to the destructive measures of his reign. On him were avenged the accumulated injuries, which his predecessors had contributed to inflict. His morals were purer than his father's; and his politics no worse than those of the much-vaunted Elizabeth. If he suffered for attempting to govern by arbitrary authority, in defiance of the rights of parliaments, those who inflicted the punishment showed what they thought of the guilt, by imitating the crime. A clergyman of singular moderation observes, "that it is absurd to call him a martyr, for there was too great a complication of causes which led to his execution, to ascribe it wholly, or principally, to religion. The vice which ruined him was insincerity; so that his enemies saw they could not trust him† to perform his insincere though liberal promises."

* Fuller.

† Warner, p. 576. Conformists' Plea for the Non-conformists, by a beneficed clergyman, passim.

As the satellites of the court had been so egregiously impolitic as to brand, for puritans, all who refused to surrender the liberties of the country to the will of the monarch; they afterwards attempted to take revenge for their own error, by availing themselves of the opportunity which it afforded, to charge the puritans with the death of the king. But a beneficed clergyman, who published a plea for the nonconformists, when they were suffering all the vengeance of the restoration, affirms, that Messrs. Calamy, Marshall, Whitaker, Sedgwick, and Ash, eminent presbyterian ministers, when consulted, declared, that the army disapproved of the design of putting the king to death. Forty-seven others of their brethren declared themselves against the measure; for which they were threatened by the leaders of the army. Sixty ministers in Essex, and fifty-four of those of Lancashire, who were the most rigid puritans*, protested against the execution of Charles. The same writer says, "a reverend and learned doctor, now in good preferment, told me he was a witness of the late transactions: and he not long ago affirmed, that Oliver complained to him, that he and his council of officers could not go on with their designs against the king's life, because of the opposition of the presbyterian ministers." The principal independents, who preached before the parliament, at the time when to applaud the execution of the king was the high road to preferment, refused to say one word in its favour. And though the above writer, with some others, affirm, that disguised jesuits instigated the deed, why should we search for mysterious causes, when it is obvious to every eye, that

* Neale. Pierce, p. 216:

the officers who led the army against the king, knowing he could never forgive them for conquering him, consulted their own safety, by cutting off a prince whom they had made their irreconcilable enemy?

The interregnum forms an important period in the ecclesiastical history of Britain. That church which had been reared by all the wealth and power of the state, and cemented with the tears and blood of dissentients was now hurled to the ground. As the parliament had petitioned the king to call a synod of divines, this assembly laboured to bring England to a conformity with the Scotch, in order to please the presbyterian army, on which they depended. The parliament wisely took care to make them know that they had no legislative power, but were called only to give advice when asked. Yet they struggled to enforce presbyterian uniformity, and thus deprived themselves of all right to reflect on the bishops, who had only pursued the same mad project in their own way. Laud and his admirers revile the assembly as an ignorant rabble of Brownists; but out of a hundred and fifty, there were only seven independent ministers, who were always distinguished as the dissenting brethren. Of their learning in that peculiar line, in which to excel was their duty, and deficiency had been a crime, their theological works have furnished proofs sufficient to perpetuate their honour, as far as the English language shall extend. The assembly's catechism needs only to be compared with that which is now sanctioned by the establishment, to form its own eulogium. And although, like all other ecclesiastical assemblies, which pretend to dictate the religion of others, they were stained with what is, in our eyes, no venial sin,

attempts to inroad on the rights of conscience; it must be owned, that they treated, with fraternal affection and respect, the dissenting brethren, who published an apology for their independent sentiments.

The assembly committed a great blunder in ecclesiastical government, by pulling down episcopacy before they were prepared with the system which they intended to substitute; so that for a twelvemonth an inundation of sects rushed in to fill up the vacuum. But it is not probable, that the parliament would ever have permitted the presbyterians to establish their system so exclusively as they wished; for the senate enacted a law, which will be to their immortal honour, abolishing all penal statutes for religion, and allowing every one to think and worship as he pleased, on taking an oath of allegiance to government*. This formed the constant complaint of the presbyterians, and one of their ministers in London published what he called *Gangræna*†, or a disclosure of the church's wounds, in which he inveighs bitterly against the various sects, dividing them into sixteen classes, which his spleen might easily have multiplied into as many hundreds.

The episcopal clergy very generally conformed to the new establishment, for though they were forbidden to read the liturgy, they were at liberty to conform their own prayers to it as much as they pleased; but to prohibit the use of the old form of prayer in the families of those who were partial to it, was most iniquitous‡. It must, however, be owned, that what may be called the conventicles of the church of England, were held by many of those who had no

* Warner p. 579. † Edward's *Gangræna*. ‡ Warner.

livings, and one of these meetings directly opposite to the house of Dr. Owen, while he was vice-chancellor of Oxford, he would never suffer to be disturbed*.

The money raised by the sale of cathedral lands, was vested in the hands of trustees, and a part of it appropriated to the support of those bishops, deans, and other clergymen, who had been deprived of their means of support. A fifth of the income of livings was afterwards devoted to the relief of the ejected incumbents. For in answer to incessant complaints of scandalous ministers, the parliament appointed a committee, who were called the tryers, by whom many were ejected as unworthy to hold livings. That the political ferment of the times influenced the decisions of this committee, is more than probable†, but to what degree learned and pious men suffered for their attachment to the king and the episcopal establishment has been disputed. It is, however,

* Dr. Owen's Life.

† Pierce p. 204—214.

Thomas Fuller, the author of the church history to which we have often referred, was known to be attached to the former order of things under the bishops, and thus feared that he should find the tryers more severe. He therefore applied to Mr. John Howe, who was an independent, and one of Cromwell's chaplains, saying to him, "you see, sir, I am a fat man, and I have to pass through a narrow passage, I wish you would give me a push." Mr. Howe, who was constantly doing kind offices to those who differed from him, pleaded his cause with the committee, so that when Fuller appeared, and was asked the usual question, whether he had ever experienced a work of grace upon his heart, he only replied, "I can appeal to the searcher of hearts that I make conscience of my very thoughts," and with this answer the committee was satisfied. While it was not a direct answer to the question, it places Fuller in an honourable light, and represents the committee as seeking not the shibboleth of a party, but the essence of religion. Howe's Life, page 7.

indisputable, that the episcopal party paid the highest compliment to the moderation and liberality, which reserved to the former incumbents a portion of their incomes, by showing, at the restoration, that the conduct of the puritans was too elevated and generous for them to imitate.

Though the dominant party, at this æra, are accused of vandalism, the parliament made a liberal donation to Trinity College Dublin, and patronized learning in the sister kingdom with so much zeal, that this unfortunate island began to assume a brighter appearance than it had ever worn before. Cromwell endowed a college at Durham, that young men from the north of the kingdom might not have to travel to Oxford and Cambridge. He gave a hundred pounds per annum to the support of a divinity professor at Oxford, presented some rare manuscripts to the Bodleian library, and permitted the paper for Dr. Walton's polyglot bible to be imported duty free. At the head of the university of Oxford was the celebrated Dr. Owen, a divine so eminent, that it may be justly questioned whether the kingdom has since produced his equal. Milton, the immortal bard, was the apologist of the commonwealth, and the Latin secretary of Cromwell.

The state of religion, during this period, who can fairly estimate? Those who are accurately acquainted with the productions of the men, who flourished under the commonwealth, will reject with contempt the current tales of universal fanaticism; though to us the picture of wonderful piety, which others have given of this æra, appears by far too highly coloured. The public fasts, which were numerous, were kept with singular strictness; but in our days it has been seen,

that times of threatening danger will awe men into a serious panic for the day; who are far enough from making religion the business and bliss of their lives. The Lord's-day was never so honoured as at this period. The sermons which are published under the title of the morning exercises, as well as some others delivered before the parliament, by presbyterian and independent divines, in point of solid learning, theological acumen, scriptural knowledge, practical utility, and popular eloquence, need not shrink from a comparison with those of any bishop under the house of Stuart. The universities were then the temples of religion, as well as the groves of the muses.

But when it is said, as by Neale * and some others, that "the great body of the people were at that time sincerely religious," we discover both undue partiality for those days, and some inattention to the real nature of religion. Heavy, and surely not unfounded, complaints are raised of the gross ignorance, and heathenish profligacy of multitudes, during the former reign; and are we to suppose, that, in a period which was not long enough to furnish preachers for the whole kingdom, millions were converted? Was Britain transformed into a nation of Christians by the mere change of the governors, and of the leading fashion of the times? Such success would have been more miraculous than that which attended the preaching of the apostles, with all the extraordinary effusion of the Spirit which accompanied the first establishment of the kingdom of Christ in the world.

There is undoubtedly some truth in the representations of Clarendon and his admirers, that hypocrisy

* History of the Puritans.

and fanaticism contributed to form the character of that period. As the rulers were bent on drilling the nation into the form of godliness; the open profaneness, in which human depravity usually appears, was stifled; and many were eager to conceal their real character under the cloak of that serious profession, which was the road to preferment, and the fashion of the times. For the same reason, many in our day adopt the contrary hypocrisy of appearing more completely debauched than they really feel. Dr. Owen frequently bewails in his sermons the restless impatience which many betrayed under the moral restraints which were then imposed on their depraved inclinations.

While the public attention was powerfully drawn towards the subject of religion, the calamities of a revolutionary period assisted to produce serious impressions on the minds of many whose radical character was yet unchanged. As the enthusiasm of liberty will, for the moment, inspire many a tame, servile spirit with the sincere conceit, that he is transformed to a patriot; so at this period, the purity of religion was the watch-word; and multitudes fancied themselves inspired to fight the battles of the Lord of Hosts, who were yet enemies to him in their own minds.

There was, however, among all ranks an unusual portion of religious knowledge. The long parliament was an assembly of divines; and though Hume ridicules them for dogmatising on abtruse points of theology, they had more reason for their conduct than he had sense to perceive, or honesty to avow. The preachers were labourers indeed, but unhappily cramped in their exertions by a narrow, sectarian spirit, which caused them bitterly to oppose those in

whose success they ought to have rejoiced. Not that it so much affected their preaching, as many have represented, for a conformist under Charles the second declares, "In many hundreds of sermons I never heard their differences of sentiment; though one was considered a presbyterian, another an independent, and a third episcopalian: nor was Calvin deified or preached, any further than as Christ spake in him*." In a word, with all the disadvantages of these times, it must be owned, that many who abhorred the change of the ancient form of government, and contributed with the warmest zeal to the restoration, afterwards bitterly deplored the loss of those days, which, when compared with the profligate reign of Charles the second, may be called, in sacred language, the days of heaven upon earth.

At length Cromwell was called to appear before the Judge of all the earth. His character and religion have been considered an insoluble enigma. That regard for liberty of conscience, for which the presbyterians hated him, now forms the surest basis of his fame†. His occasional severities, towards the favourers of the church of England, have been excused as just retaliation on those who were constantly plotting against his person and government‡; but he ought to have known to distinguish between the worshippers of God, and the subjects of the state. Cromwell's personal religion commenced before he had any public part to act; and while he was yet a member of the church of England, he was, like many others, branded as a puritan, for his opposition to arminian doctrines and arbitrary power. That his public station had not improved his character, he seems to have been himself

* Preface to Conformist's Plea. † Warner, 592. ‡ Ibid, 586.

conscious; for he speaks of his being fallen from the eminence on which he once stood, to a state of religion inferior to many whom he knew and envied. His morals, however, are unimpeached*, except by slanderers, who love accusations, but hate proofs; and if his profession of religion had been insincere, would he never have dropped the mask? His fanatical expressions, as they have been called, were the language of the day, which had become habitual to him, before he appeared on the public stage. As the able historian of Phillip the second says of that monarch's zeal for the catholic religion, we may say of Cromwell's devotedness to the protestant cause†, "it was too steady, uniform, and ardent to have been entirely hypocritical." Nor can it be proved, that he ever deceived any party, or violated the professions he made.

His chaplains were the most able and faithful men that England, or any other country, has ever known; the sermons they delivered to him were superior to any which crowned heads now hear; and Howe preached a discourse expressly to confute the notion of a particular faith in prayer, to which he knew the protector was attached. Though Cromwell may be thought to have favoured these divines, because they were the principal men among the independents, and might serve his political purposes; Howe was too catholic to be a partisan of that or any other opinion,

* Warner, 591.

† Bishop Burnet has given a singular display of the unrivalled services which the protector performed for the protestant religion, and of the dread which the pope and his partisans felt at the name of Cromwell. He says that king James, gave this reason for turning to the Roman catholic religion, because he found all the zealous protestants great friends of Cromwell. *Own Times*, p. 73.

which divides Christians, and Dr. Owen challenged all the world to prove that ever he had been active in setting up or pulling down any political party. His chaplains are said to have declared, that God had promised them he should not die in that which proved his last illness; but this, and the story of his comforting himself on his death-bed with assurance of heaven, because he was once converted, are alike destitute of proof, and of probability.

Cromwell's ashes were scarcely cold before the officers of the army wrested the sceptre from the hands of Richard, his son and successor. The civil histories of this period record the struggles of the various parties, which led to the restoration. When the presbyterians had determined to invite the return of Charles and monarchy, general Monk, who returned from Scotland with his army, dexterously fell in with the current, and secured to himself the praise and the reward. Charles, while on tip-toe for his crown, was lavish of promises to forget injuries, to grant liberty to tender consciences, and never to forget the services of the presbyterians*. To preserve appearances, ten divines of that persuasion were nominated as chaplains in ordinary, from whom he heard three sermons. The book of common prayer was restored, and before the end of the year, those who refused to make use of it were harrassed with severe prosecutions.

When Cromwell was advised to restore the prince, with legal restraints for the security of liberty, he replied, "he is so damnably debauched, he will undo us all.†" Charles now did honour to his enemies' penetration. From the constrained decency of the commonwealth, all ranks now burst forth into the

* Warner, vol. ii. p. 593.

† Burnet's Own Times, 79.

most profligate debaucheries. Patronized by the king, the stage presented scenes which might make a harlot blush. The lewdest intrigues were the whole business of the court*. To drink the king's health to beastly excess was the only proof of loyalty. The puritans wept aloud over their country, now become as Sodom, which, before its destruction, was the focus of lust, and afterwards, the lively image of hell. Yet, where was the consistency of lamenting the ruin of the church of Christ, which still retained as many genuine members as before, except where death had thinned their ranks? Instead of conceiving that the nature of things was reversed, that the sun moved towards the east, and rivers flowed back to their source; it was but an exemplification of the prophetic axiom, "the wicked will do wickedly." None were become profane but those who were not before pious. This reverse in the face of society, only proved the folly of introducing a system of ecclesiastico-military tactics to reduce a whole nation into the forms and movements of a church.

But while the opinion we before expressed is thus awfully confirmed, that there was less religion than was pretended, during the period of the commonwealth; when we hear the debauchees at the restoration revile all the puritans as hypocrites, and insinuate that every appearance of superior morality must be hollow deceit, we know not whether it should excite more indignant surprise, or contemptuous ridicule. For who were the hypocrites? Those who, when the foaming polluted tide, which had been long pent up, broke down its mounds, and carried every thing else before it, still stood, like a

* Burnet's Own Times, p. 93. Warner, vol. II. p. 594.

rock, "among the faithless, faithful only they?" Those who, having professed a heartfelt attachment to pure and undefiled religion, when it enjoyed the smiles of the state, retained their profession, when it cost them all that was dear to them in life? Or those who, having canted, as they would call it, when canting was in fashion, suddenly turned with the returning tide, and, from a demure appearance, outraged all decency, and treated religion itself as mere grimace? Yet these were the men who (perhaps to purge themselves from suspicion) flung about so profusely their accusations, which have been since retailed by a servile herd of imitators.

The complete failure of the scheme for giving dominion to religion, affords, however, an additional exposition of the Redeemer's words, "my kingdom is not of this world." To say nothing of the unpleasantness of the post, it may be questioned whether Gabriel would be equal to the task of ruling in Pandemonium; and as Christians must expect to be outnumbered in the ordinary state of the world, they should be thankful that they are not called to sway the sceptre of their Redeemer, who alone is able to rule in the midst of his enemies. The influence of believers in the world, must be by the gradual effects of the Gospel on the hearts of individual converts, and the elevated tone of morals, which their sentiments and example will secretly inspire in the public mind. After some consultation with the presbyterian divines, Charles published a royal declaration concerning religion, which being very liberal, was thankfully received; but the king took care that it should not become a law*. On the terms of this declara-

* Warner, vol. II. p. 598—600.

tion many conformed to the episcopal establishment, and Dr. Reynolds accepted the bishoprick of Norwich. At length, to get rid of the presbyterians with a good grace, a conference was appointed; but, as was then observed, the divines nominated on behalf of the establishment were the most rigid men, who were exasperated against the puritans; so that the two parties were, by this farce, thrown to a greater distance than before*.

In the convocation, the prayer-book was altered from bad to worse. To accommodate those who objected to the use of the apocrypha in the liturgy, the edifying story of Bell and the dragon was now added†. Dr. Sheldon, bishop of London, who is said by Burnet to have regarded religion only as an engine of state, hearing the earl of Manchester say to the king, "the terms are so hard, I am afraid the presbyterians will not conform," replied, "I am afraid they will; but now we know their minds, we will make them all knaves if they do." Indeed this was the study of the bishops, to make the terms of conformity as hard as possible; for they wished to wrest from the presbyterians many of the good livings which they then held. The king, his mistresses, and the secret cabal of papists at court, were bent on throwing such a number out of the establishment, that a toleration might become necessary, under the shelter of which they might skreen the papists‡. Almost all the sufferings which the non-conformists endured, was to force them to yield to this project which they dreaded and abhorred.

* Pierce, p. 224.

† Burnet's Own Times, p. 182. The Conformists' Plea for the Non-conformists. Warner.

‡ Warner, vol. II. p. 606. Burnet's Own Times, p. 182.

On St. Bartholomew's-day, August the twenty-fourth, in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty-two, the act of uniformity expelled from the establishment all ministers who would not swear their unfeigned assent, and consent to every thing in the Book of Common Prayer. In many parts of the kingdom, the ministers could not procure the book before the time within which the law required them to swear to it, or resign their livings: so that, in their farewell sermons, they told their flocks, that they were obliged to leave them for not swearing to a book, which they had not been able to see. But this was no obstacle to the ruling party, who wished for the most costly sacrifices at the shrine of absolute obedience, and longed to rid themselves of men who were troubled with a conscience.

Two thousand ministers resigned their livings in the establishment, and exposed themselves to the loss of all things rather than submit to these new terms of conformity, which their consciences condemned *. Bartholomew's-day was chosen, because, they would thus be deprived of their year's income, which would be due shortly after. No portion of their former livings was reserved to keep them from starving; for these persecutors were not ashamed to be outdone by their enemies †. The great Mr. Locke styles these two thousand ejected ministers, learned, pious, orthodox divines; and we have no hesitation in saying, that of them the world was not worthy, nor have their equals been seen in any age or nation. Their writings have erected to their memory a monument more durable than brass or marble, which has so perpetuated and diffused their sentiments and

* Calamy's Non-conformists' Memorial, passim. Pierce, p. 232.

† Buruet, vol. II. p. 184. Warner.

spirit, that had their enemies anticipated the consequences of excluding them from the pulpits, they would have left them to preach that they might have had no leisure to write.

Ecclesiastical history furnishes no such instance of a noble army of confessors at one time: it is an honour peculiar to the English dissenters. Never has the world seen such a sacrifice to principle. A person, who was no dissenter, observed at that time, "I am glad so many have chosen suffering, rather than conformity to the establishment; for had they complied, the world would have thought there had been nothing in religion; but now they have a striking proof that there are some sincere in their professions." A conformist thus liberally pleads their cause*. "They have suffered the loss of all things: is it for mere honour, not conscience or religion? Have they so little wit as not to know what is best, good livings, or nasty prisons? Do they hate their wives and children? They declare, they cannot conform: Who should know best, they or we?"

From this time, the name of puritan was exchanged for that of non-conformist, including presbyterians, independents, baptists, and quakers. They petitioned the king for an indulgence, which, for the sake of covering the Roman catholics, he seemed disposed to grant; but as the parliament was unwilling, they gave him money, and he left the sufferers to their fate. Thus were the tears and blood of the non-conformists, through all this reign, the prize for which the parliament bestowed subsidies on the king. Some of the ejected ministers, to show their catholicism, practised what was called occasional conformity, by

* Conformists' Plea.

going to the established places, and joining in the worship, though they could not comply with the terms required of ministers, to swear that they assented to every thing in the book of common prayer*.

To add iniquity to iniquity, the conventicle act was passed, decreeing, that if any person, above the age of sixteen years be present at any meeting for worship, different from the church of England, where there shall be five persons more than the household, they shall, for the first offence, suffer three months imprisonment, or pay five pounds; for the second, the punishment is doubled; and for the third, they shall be banished to America, or pay a hundred pounds; and if they return from banishment, suffer death†. The oath of an informer was sufficient to inflict all the severity of this statute of Draco. While many of the best of men filled our jails, the vilest of the human race rioted in debauchery by informing, for the sake of the reward.

A most dreadful plague visited this aceldama of persecution, and while some of the conforming ministers faithfully stood by their flocks, the greater part of them fled, as the hireling when he seeth the wolf; so that the non-conformists seized this opportunity of preaching to the multitudes who, while on the brink of the grave, were left as sheep without a shepherd. But as no revenge could satisfy, so no judgments could alarm the high party; for they now introduced an act to restrain non-conformists from inhabiting corporations. An oath of pas-

* Dr. Calamy being present at his late parish of Aldermanbury, London, was invited to preach, as the person expected did not come. For complying he was thrown into Newgate; but there was such a resort of persons of distinction to visit him, that it was thought prudent, after a few days, to restore him to liberty.

† Burnet, p. 204.

sive obedience, and non-resistance* was enacted; and all who refused it, were prohibited from coming within five miles of any corporate town where they formerly preached; or from keeping schools, or taking boarders, under a penalty of forty pounds. Thus, though they were not actually burnt alive, they were intentionally starved to death. But while earth and hell were against them, heaven appeared in their behalf. During twenty-eight years of sufferings, their enemies were never gratified by any resistance; nor was any of them in prison for debt. Scarcely Elijah himself was fed more immediately from heaven†.

The king, at length, began to complain aloud of the bishops and conforming clergy‡, who increased the numbers of dissenters by their conduct, which the people could not help contrasting with that of the ejected ministers. Hence a scheme for toleration was now talked of; but though it was cherished by the moderate divines of the establishment, it roused such opposition from the bigots§, that the non-conformists were left to all the fury of renewed persecution. A paper war fanned the flames of hatred and bigotry. Ralph Willis, called the cobbler of Gloucester, published an account of the scandalous lives

* Warner, vol. II. p. 604. Warner, p. 612.

† The righteous governor of the world sent fire as well as plague, so that eighty-nine parish churches in London, together with St. Paul's cathedral, were burnt down. Some temporary places were erected with boards, where, as well as in their own abodes, the non-conformists preached. They were called tabernacles; a name which has been since familiar among those who worship apart from the establishment. Drs. Owen and Goodwin, with other independent ministers, adopted this practice, so that many of the citizens of London flocked to the places where the liturgy was not used.

‡ Pierce, p. 240. Warner, vol. II. p. 611, 615.

§ Warner, p. 615.

of many of the conforming clergy. Samuel Parker, afterwards bishop of Oxford, was the champion for the hierarchy ; but he was answered by Andrew Marvel, the pasquin of his age, whose lively wit effected more than all the learning of Dr. Owen's grave replies ; so that his book afforded merriment to all ranks and parties, from the king and his mistresses, down to the lowest of the populace.

The act against conventicles, was renewed with additional severity* ; denying to the sufferers the protection of trial by jury ; exposing them to conviction on the oath of a single informer, who was rewarded by a third of the exorbitant fine ; while the laws were always to be interpreted against mercy and the non-conformists. Volumes could not contain a complete history of the sufferings of these men, whose souls, from beneath the altar of God, cry, "how long, Lord, holy, just, and true?" At length, to accomplish the design of favouring the papists, and establish the king's prerogative to dispense with the laws, a declaration of indulgence was published by his majesty, suspending all the penal laws against dissenters, and allowing them to meet in places of worship licensed by the king. The high-church clergy were dreadfully alarmed, and severely condemned the dissenters for using the liberty of which they had been unjustly deprived†.

* To the honour of bishop Williams it should be recorded, that he argued against this infamous act, though the king had requested him not to speak against it, or to stay away from the house while it was debated. He told his majesty that, as an Englishman and a senator he was bound to speak his mind. Warner, p. 615.

† At this time was passed the Test Act, of which we shall speak intirely in the words of Dr. Warner, the clergyman to whose history so frequent reference is made in the progress of this work. "What-

At length Charles, under whom they had suffered twenty years of bitter persecution, died by poison, according to bishop Burnet. To this prelate we are indebted for an account of his character and death. There is strong evidence that he became a papist before he was the champion of the church of England, and the enemy of dissenters; but to us it appears a

ever the dissenters might at first think of the indulgence, they saw now that they were only to be tools to advance the Romish religion; therefore alderman Love, a city member, and a leading presbyterian, spoke against it with great zeal, and said, that they would rather go without their desired liberty, than have it in a way so detrimental to the nation. The house of commons, which had for ten years been loading them with penal laws, were so wrought upon by this sacrifice of their liberty to the interest of the nation and religion, that they ordered a bill to be brought in to take off the penalties of the act of uniformity, and require only the oaths of allegiance and supremacy. It passed in the commons, but being detained for amendments in the lords, the parliament was prorogued before it was ready for the royal assent. But the king having, at the remonstrance of the commons, revoked the indulgence, and promised to pass any bill they should present to him for the security of religion; they took him at his word, and passed a bill to prevent dangers which may happen from popish recusants; requiring all persons, in any office under government, to take the sacrament in the church of England.

When this bill, which has since been called the Test Act, was brought into the house the court endeavoured to prevent it, by dividing the protestant church party, with a proposal for some regard to the protestant dissenters. But alderman Love, seeing the project, stood up again, and said, "he hoped the clause proposed in favour of dissenters, would occasion no intemperate heat: that he should move for passing the bill, which was such a barrier against popery, without any alteration, without interposing any thing till it was finished; the dissenters choosing rather to lie under the severity of the laws for a time, than clog a more necessary work." This defeated the scheme of the court; and as no money-bill could be obtained without, the king gave his assent. Though the protestant religion stood in need of the united strength of all its professors

nugatory question to ask, what was the religion of a graceless debauchee; for he used to come from the bed of his harlots to church and to sacrament. He was not cruel in his own disposition, but as he was ever ready to sacrifice the non-conformists for money to pursue his guilty pleasures, they suffered as much from him as if he had been a Nero. If we may believe James, his successor on the throne, he died in the communion of the church of England. Truly that must be a *holy* mother church which could esteem itself honoured by such a son as Charles the second.

His last moments present an awful scene: sitting up in the bed, with one of his mistresses, who treated him as her husband, he recommended his other harlots to the care of his successor, but said not one word of his wife, or his people, or his debts, though he had saved ninety thousand guineas, which should have paid them. The bishops of the church of England were excluded, and a popish priest called in, who gave him the consecrated wafer, which, from the languor of his frame, he could not swallow, without a glass of water to wash it down*. Thus he passed to a tribunal, before which our imagination shudders to behold him.

The duke of Yorke, who now ascended the throne against popery, and of all the civil securities which could be given for the church and state, yet I presume to say, that it is not only a great prostitution of the sacrament, to make it a qualification for civil offices and employments, but an infatuation to suppose it can be any security for our religion. The zeal, however, of this house of commons against popery, inclined both churchmen and dissenters to pass the act: and it has ever since continued, much to the dishonour, I think, of our holy religion." Warner, vol. II. p. 619—620.

* Burnet's Own Times, vol. II, p. 606—9.

by the title of James the second, began his reign with an honest avowal of popery*. The dissenters were persecuted with tenfold fury ; for, availing himself of Monmouth's rebellion† to crush the enemies of popery, and arbitrary power, the king turned his realm into a slaughter-house ; of which judge Jeffereys was the grand butcher‡. After his western circuit, the quarters of several hundred persons were hung up all over the country, for fifty or sixty miles. This fiery persecution produced an effect supremely honourable to the sufferers, for several ministers of the establishment forsook it, as unworthy the name of a church of Christ, since it was stained with the blood of the saints, the dye of the scarlet whore. This new band of non-conformists had the glory of taking up the cross, when it crushed many to death.

But the king advanced so rapidly in the road to Rome, that the clergy took the alarm, and began to tremble for their livings, and their consequence in the state. James, irritated at this, wheeled round and courted the dissenters, pretending that he had always wished to favour them, but the clergy had opposed, offering rather to yield to the papists, provided they might be allowed to crush the dissenters. The penal laws were now suspended, and the meetings which had for years been maintained with great secrecy and hazard were publicly held§. The high party which had betrayed the liberties of the country, for the vile price of their enemies' blood, now became wonderfully patriotic. Both the church and the king courted the dissenters. This terminated the prosecutions for non-conformity ; for although the penal statutes still

* Warner, p. 630.

† Ibidem, p. 631.

‡ Pierce, 263—4.

§ Warner, p. 633.

existed* they lay dormant, till by the act of toleration they were annulled. The dissenters wisely improved their liberties, without inquiring what was the design of the robber, in restoring to them their own, and justly concluding, that if they could preach the Gospel, and render men Christians, this was the most effectual way to prevent their becoming papists. But when James tempted them to active concurrence with his measures for introducing popery and arbitrary power, he found them so determined against sacrificing their country's liberties, that he said, "they were an ill-natured set, who could not be gained †."

When the king published his royal declaration for liberty of conscience, and commanded it to be read in all the churches, the clergy were greatly embarrassed. Several of the bishops having ventured to address his majesty against this declaration, which was founded on the illegal claim of a power to suspend the laws, were sent to the tower ‡, where they were kindly visited by the dissenters, whom they had hunted into prisons. After a long trial in Westminster-hall, they were nobly acquitted, and seemed so much improved by their sufferings, that even Sancroft became an advocate for kindness to those, whom he now deigned to call his protestant dissenting brethren.

But James, pursuing his infatuated councils, provoked the nation to invite over William, prince of Orange, who had married his daughter, in order to rescue the church and the liberties of England. The church party expressed their approbation of the Dutch invasion in such terms, that James was surprized and confounded, after all their declarations that passive

* Warner, vol. II. p. 264.

† Ibidem, p. 639, 640.

‡ Ibidem, p. 264.

obedience, and non-resistance was the doctrine of the church of England, and that resistance to kings on any pretence was damnable*. But this was good and wholesome doctrine no longer than the application was confined to their enemies†; for as soon as James gave them to feel the weight of it upon their own persons, they rose and drove from the throne‡ the unhappy monarch, who had learned from them to believe himself the inviolate king of a nation of slaves, and whose eyes were opened time enough to see himself ruined. With all their accusations, they could never bring such proofs of rebellion from puritan ministers, as were now displayed by the clergy. Compton, bishop of London, like a true son of the church militant, girded on the armour, and with a red coat and sword, assisting Anne to desert her father and king, fled with her to meet the invading prince. Burnet, who was afterwards bishop of Sarum, had carried on the negociation in Holland, and having come over with William, was a chaplain in his army.

Yet who will charge the established clergy with more hypocrisy, than will ever be found under the profession of such political principles§? As a doctrine of religion, abstinence from all political interference, and non-resistance of injuries, may be sincerely maintained. But by whom? The gay student in the elegant retreat of academic groves? Or by the pampered dignitary, “ clothed in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day? Certainly not. But by those whose superior regard for eternity has sacrificed the friendship of the world, who, every day

* Warner, p. 630.

† Burnet's Own Times, vol. II. p. 699.

‡ Warner, p. 647.

§ Ibidem, p. 643.

submitting to mortifications which they might easily avoid, lead a life of voluntary martyrdom.

Of the sufferings of the non-conformists, though *we* can make but an imperfect statement, the exact record is on high. Mr. Jeremy White is said to have collected a list of sixty thousand persons, who had suffered for dissent, between the restoration and the revolution, of whom five thousand died in prison. Lord Dorset was assured by Mr. White, that king James had offered a thousand guineas for the manuscript, but that in tenderness to the reputation of the church of England, he had determined to conceal the black record. In the preface to the plea for the non-conformists by Mr. Delaune, that gentleman is said to have been one of near eight thousand, who, in the reign of Charles the second, had, for dissenting from the church of England, perished in prison. It is added that within three years, property was wrung from them to the amount of two millions sterling. But who could calculate the total loss of lives, and of substance which the dissenters sustained from the first rise of the puritans to the triumph of toleration under king William? It is justly questioned, whether the annals of the Christian church, since the reformation, contain any instance of persecution equally severe. The multitudes, who fled from these oppressions, peopled a considerable part of the new world; while the English refugees, who formed churches in all the principal towns of Holland, added to the strength and industry of that rising state. But from these accumulated injuries, the dissenters rose, at the revolution, little diminished in strength or numbers, and capable of turning either scale, into which they might choose to throw their weight*.

* Neal, vol. V. p. 21.

HISTORY OF DISSENTERS.

FIRST PERIOD.

Containing the History of the Dissenters from the Revolution to the Death of Queen Anne.

CHAP. I.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE SEVERAL DENOMINATIONS
OF DISSENTERS, THEIR DISTINGUISHING SENTIMENTS AND RISE.

SECTION I. THE PRESBYTERIANS.

THIS denomination, which is derived from the Greek word **PRESBUTEROS**, elder, signifies a body governed by the united presbyters, or elders of the churches. They stand distinguished, on the one hand, from those who plead for the distinct order of diocesan bishops, with authority to rule both presbyters and people; and, on the other, from such as maintain the right of every Christian congregation, to regulate its own affairs, by the voice of the brethren.

The presbyterian believes that Christ, the legislator of his church, has appointed but one order of ministers to preach his word and administer the sacraments. To express their diversified qualifications and duties, they are called by the various names of

overseer, or bishop ; presbyter, or elder ; pastor, or shepherd ; teacher and minister : but the identity of the office is evident ; for the same persons who were, in one verse, called elders or presbyters, are, in the next, styled bishops or overseers^a. That these presbyter-bishops formed the highest, as well as lowest, order of ministers, competent to every duty of the sacred function, who can doubt, when they read that Timothy, who is, by episcopalians revered as a bishop, was ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery ? The notion of a distinct order of bishops, superior to presbyters, seems to have arisen from the plurality of elders, which obtained in each primitive church ; for when the pastors met together in what is called the presbytery, or eldership, he, who was most revered for age, piety, or usefulness, would become a kind of president, or moderator. This chair of courtesy in a meeting of his equals might, by an ambitious man, in course of time, be easily converted to a seat of office, and a throne of power. In support of this opinion, Jerome is quoted as saying, “ the church was governed *communi presbyterorum concilio*, by the common-council of the elders. But on the decease of the elder, who had been chosen moderator, his place was supplied with another elected by the elders from among themselves ; and thus, by degrees, the whole pastoral care of the flock devolved on one man.

In addition, however, to these elders, or bishops, who administer the word and sacraments, presbyterians choose, from among the people, some who are called, ruling elders, who are considered lay officers, and assist only in the government of the church. To

^a Acts xx. 17, 18.

these the apostle is supposed to refer, when he says, "let the elders, who rule well, be counted worthy of double honour; especially those who labour in word and doctrine." Hence it is supposed, that there were, in the primitive churches, some who were not ministers of the word, but were chosen to rule, and not to teach. To these, are added deacons, on whom devolves the care of the poor.

A meeting of these several officers forms a classis, or class, or, as it is called in Scotland, a kirk session. The minister is, by office, president, or moderator, but has no other than a casting voice, when the votes of the other elders are equal. The vote of the deacons is admitted only in those questions which relate to the relief of the poor. This court governs each distinct congregation; but from its decision, appeals may be brought to the next judicatory, which we have now to describe.

An assembly, composed of all the pastors within a certain district, together with one ruling elder from each parish, forms a presbytery. The jurisdiction of this court extends to all the congregations which have deputed hither their ministers and ruling elders. Within these limits, the presbytery examines candidates for the ministry; gives licenses to preach on probation; ordains to the sacred office; confirms the election of ministers by their flocks; pronounces sentence on accusations of erroneous doctrine, or improper conduct; and confirms, or revokes, the sentence of excommunication, which has been passed by the different classes on the members of their respective congregations.

A synod is the next court in the ascending scale, and is composed of the members of all the presby-

teries within its bounds. Persons who conceive themselves aggrieved by the sentence of the inferior judicatories, may bring their appeal to the synod, which exercises the same authority over the several presbyteries, as these over the kirk sessions. In the church of Scotland there are fifteen synods, each of which meets twice a year.

But the general assembly of the church of Scotland is the supreme court, to which lies a final appeal from every other ecclesiastical tribunal. It is composed of a certain number of ministers, and ruling elders, chosen from each presbytery. The universities and royal burghs of Scotland also delegate members to the assembly. The king presides by his commissioner, who is always a nobleman, but has no voice. This is the *acme* of presbyterian hierarchy, of which we have taken the church of Scotland as a specimen; because here the stranger may contemplate this form of church-government, established on an extensive scale, rendered illustrious by the sufferings from which it has risen triumphant, adorned by the talents and virtues of its members, and now growing venerable in years.

The advocates of presbyterianism insist chiefly on the scriptural evidence, for the parity of ministers, the identity of bishops and presbyters, the authority of the latter to ordain all other ministers, the right of elders to rule without asking the consent of the brethren, and the subordination of each congregation to a higher tribunal or synod. Some, indeed, maintain the divine authority of the general assembly, and of all the other gradations of the presbyterian discipline; affirming, that every pin of the sacred tabernacle is prescribed by the sovereign Ruler, and revealed in his

sacred word. Leaving them, however, to prove this as they can, we proceed to trace the history of this communion.

On reviewing the æra of Wickliffe, among other instances of his superior knowledge of Christian verities, we noticed his opinion, that, in the primitive times, there were but the two orders of priests and deacons. The reformers seem, however, to have at first supposed that the corruptions of the Christian church were confined to its doctrines and forms of devotion. Without paying much attention to ecclesiastical discipline, the defence of his sentiments and manner of worship seems to have furnished sufficient employment for the ardent soul of Luther. And who can wonder that men just emerged from the thickest darkness, saw not every thing clearly at first? It was reserved for Calvin to give notoriety to a sentiment, which, to every unprejudiced mind, must appear sufficiently probable, that the ancient regimen of the church of Christ had been abandoned, and a corrupt system of ecclesiastical discipline introduced to suit the ambition and avarice of those who had converted the Christian temple into a house of merchandise, a den of thieves. To the reformer of Genève it appeared, that, if the bishop of Rome was the image of the beast, which had been set up for idolatrous worship, the other lord bishops of the church were the lofty pedestal on which it had been erected; so that a complete reformation must, with the image, destroy also the base on which it stood. But Calvin was not the mere architect of ruin. Conceiving that he had discovered in the sacred books, the form of government which Christ originally established in the Christian church, by the ministry of his apostles,

he deemed it the imperious duty of a reformer to restore this primitive code to its ancient authority and use; in order to secure to the Christian church the complete and permanent benefit of those changes which had been so recently and happily effected.

Farrel having induced the inhabitants of Geneva to expel their popish bishop, and his religion, from the city, earnestly importuned Calvin to come and perfect their reformation. This he refused, unless they would engage to submit to the plan of ecclesiastical discipline which he had drawn out, and of which we have given the outlines in the account of presbyterian government. Though the Genevese consented, it cannot be supposed that the promiscuous multitude, which formed the population of a large city and its surrounding territory, who, yesterday, were grovelling in the ignorance and licentiousness of popery, should feel prepared to submit to all that rigour of discipline, which might suit a single church of real Christians. Some of the magistrates and principal citizens having indulged themselves in amusements, which Calvin and his brethren in the consistory of the church condemned, the stern reformer pronounced on them the same censure, as would have been employed to restrain the licentiousness of the lowest orders of the city. Galled by the yoke, the citizens rose, burst it asunder, and expelled Calvin and Farrel from Geneva. This would have been a profitable lesson, had it induced the exiles to reflect, that their model of discipline, allowing it to be drawn from the sacred Scriptures, was there exhibited as the regulations, not of a whole state, but of a church, or a community, gathered out of the world.

and formed by divine grace to tempers and habits suited to the high tone of morals, at which the Genevese spurned.

Calvin retired to Strasburg, where he taught theology, and preached the Gospel. When the citizens of Geneva began to cool, they reflected on the purity of his life, the extent of his learning, the celebrity of his labours, and the dignity of his character; while they could not see, without envious regret, the numerous and distinguished scholars, whom his unrivalled fame attracted to the city of his residence. They invited his return, promising to yield obedience to his favourite discipline, in which they faithfully persevered till his death^b.

As Calvin was a native of France, resided on the borders of that country, and had dedicated his celebrated Institutes to its monarch, Francis the first, the French protestants embraced the system of their renowned countryman. They were, at first, supposed to be Lutherans; but it is probable that, when the Saxon reformer rose into notice, they had not yet considered the points in which those two great men differed, and that they joined with Luther only in his hostility to Rome. The presbyterian discipline, adopted by a body so numerous and important as the French protestants, appeared in great splendor. They formed a twelfth part of the population of France, boasted of many whole towns, which were exclusively protestant, and reckoned among the members of their communion several of the most powerful of the nobility. Indeed it was their unhappiness, and their error, if not their crime, to have formed great political alliances; so that they were

^b Bayle Dictionaire, au mot de Calvin.

considered almost as a smaller independent state, within the larger, and were in possession of several of the fortified towns of the kingdom. Henry the third gave them in Dauphiné alone no fewer than fourteen. The massacre which commenced at Paris under Charles the ninth, in the year one thousand five hundred and seventy-one, destroyed thirty thousand of them in two months. At length, through many vicissitudes, and furious civil wars, they obtained from Henry the fourth, who had been educated in their communion, the famous edict of Nantz, which was granted in the year one thousand five hundred and ninety-eight, and formed for near a century the *magna charta* of their religious liberties. But in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-five, Louis the fourteenth crowned a life of infidel debaucheries, with the revocation of the edict, and the horrors of a persecution, which laid in ashes their once flourishing church^c.

Calvin was in high estimation among the protestant cantons of Switzerland, where the presbyterian discipline was early established. Berne, Zurich, and Basle, however, refused to submit to all the strictness which obtained at Geneva^d.

When the inhabitants of the Netherlands burst at once the fetters of Rome and Spain, and formed the republic of the united provinces, they hesitated, for a time, between Luther and Calvin. Each of these communions could reckon in the states some very powerful friends and patrons. But the doctrines of Calvin, and the presbyterian discipline, triumphed

^c Siecle de Louis XIV. par M. de Voltaire.

^d Mosheim.

in one thousand seven hundred and fifty-one^e, and have been, ever since, maintained.

The palatinate received the first light of the reformation from the disciples of Luther; but the elector, Frederick the third, afterwards introduced the system of Geneva. The new profession was obliged to yield again to its predecessor for a time; but was, at last, firmly established. Mosheim affirms, that the church of the palatinate holds the second rank among the reformed; for this term, which, with us, is the denomination of all protestants, is employed on the continent of Europe to distinguish the Calvinists from the Lutherans. Hesse Cassel, with some other states of the German empire, maintains the presbyterian discipline, which is also adopted by the protestants of Piedmont, Hungary, Transylvania, and some parts both of Prussia and Poland.

The presbyterian discipline was also introduced into Britain. For while Calvin was exhausting his mighty powers in various useful labours at Geneva, the famous Scotchman, John Knox, became pastor of an English presbyterian church in that city. This apostle of the Scots' reformation had been a subtle theologian in the church of Rome; but by reading the works of Jerome and Austin, he became enamoured of the sacred Scriptures. Before he was personally acquainted with Calvin, he had refused, with a kind of horror, a bishoprick, which king Edward had offered him; inveighing against prelatical episcopacy as a remnant of popish superstition. For this, Beza, who has been represented as favourably disposed towards the English hierarchy, bestows on him the highest eulogiums^f. On the accession of

^e Mosheim.

^f Bayle Dictionnaire, au mot de Knox.

Mary, he fled to Frankfort, where we have seen him struggling for what he deemed purity of worship. After his removal to Geneva, he received the grateful news, that the friends of reformation had begun to introduce their religion into his native country. He rushed from his peaceable retreat to contend amidst the storm, and laboured with a zeal, rude, boisterous, and irresistible as his northern clime, to establish presbytery beyond the Tweed. His eloquence, which was suited to those rugged times; his courage, which delighted in dangers; and his diligence, which knew no intermission; soon secured him a decided majority among his countrymen. Roused by the voice of Knox, the Scots burst, like an inundation of the ocean, upon the territories of Rome; stripped the churches of their ornaments; demolished the objects of ancient adoration; and often insulted, with unchristian violence, the adherents of the established religion.

In the latter part of the year one thousand five hundred and sixty was held the first general assembly of the church of Scotland. As the reformation had not yet been diffused through all parts of the country, many important places sent no delegates; so that their numbers were small, and few of them were considerable for rank or talents. This assembly, however, voted the introduction of that discipline, which was afterwards established in Scotland^s.

Knox presented to a convention of the states, which was held in the year one thousand five hundred and sixty-one, the first book of discipline, which he had composed. With some variations,

^s Robertson's History of Scotland.

which circumstances seemed to demand, it was a faithful copy of the regimen of Geneva. Whatever zeal the states discovered in establishing presbytery, they were determined not to restore to the new establishment the church lands, which they had seized. Every proposal, which the ministers made for this restitution, was treated as "a devout imagination." Thus the presbyterian church of Scotland was, from its birth, doomed to comparative indigence.

The house of Stuart was engaged in almost incessant attempts to overthrow the presbyterian establishment of their country, which they despised as deficient in splendor, and hated for its excessive purity and rigour. The violent and arbitrary attempts of the first Charles, to force episcopacy upon his countrymen, though so fatal to himself, were imitated by his profligate son. Some of the best men whom Scotland, or any other country has ever known, were, in pursuit of this mad project, driven to exile, prisons, and death. When, at length, the Stuarts were finally hurled from the throne, Scotland acquired by the revolution, the peaceable enjoyment of its beloved presbytery.

The history of the presbyterians in England was necessarily interwoven with our introduction. Though the puritans were, from their rise, partial to the discipline and service-book of Geneva, they, at first, aimed only at exemption from some habits and ceremonies of the English establishment. But when all hopes of lenity or moderation from the court and hierarchy had vanished, they made a bold application to parliament for a legal alteration in the discipline of the church.

Several ministers, who were decidedly presbyte-

rians in their judgment, agreed to present to the legislature what they entitled "an admonition to parliament." It contained the plan of a presbyterian church, the manner of electing ministers, their duties and their equality in government. The corruptions of the hierarchy were exposed, with all the severity of language which is characteristic of those times. A letter from Beza to the earl of Leicester, and one from Gualter to a bishop, recommending a reformation in the discipline of the English church, were annexed to the admonition. They conclude with a petition to the legislature, praying for a reformation in the establishment, by which it might be rendered "more consonant to the word of God, and to the foreign reformed churches." The authors of the admonition, who presented it to the parliament themselves, were for their boldness committed to Newgate, October the second, in the year one thousand five hundred and seventy two^b.

A second admonition by Mr. Cartwright, and an elegant Latin apology by the prisoners, procured them no redress. The hopes of legislative sanction, which the presbyterians had indulged, being now extinguished, they determined to erect at once a presbytery. As Mr. Field, lecturer of Wandsworth, a village about five miles from London, was a warm patron of the plan, the first presbyterian church in England was formed at Wandsworth, November the twentieth, in the year one thousand five hundred and seventy-two. Eleven elders were chosen, and their offices inscribed in a register, entitled *the orders of Wandsworth*^c.

^b Pierce's Vindication of the Dissenters, p. 84.

^c Neal's History of the Puritans, vol. I. p. 266.

Other presbyteries were erected in most parts of England; but especially at Northampton, Kettering, Daventry, and in Warwickshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Essex. A dialogue published in Elizabeth's reign, represents the number of the presbyterians as amounting to a hundred thousand^k. The separate presbyterian churches celebrated the Lord's supper according to the manner of the foreign protestants.

But the intolerance of the government through several reigns, drove the presbyterians from their native land. They followed the independents across the atlantic, and established, in the wilds of America, the system of ecclesiastical discipline, which they deemed consonant to the divine word, and essential to their religious prosperity. From the commencement formed by these refugees, have arisen six or seven hundred presbyterian congregations. This communion prevails most in the states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee^l.

In the reign of James the first, the presbyterians established themselves in Ireland also, where they have ever since formed an important body. The ministers of the English establishment, well accommodated at home, declined the more arduous labours to which they were invited among the colonies planted by the citizens of London, in the province of Ulster. The persecuted puritans were glad to enter and cultivate this neglected field. The Scots were, by their vicinity, led to the north of Ireland, where they formed churches upon the presbyterian model. - The bishops

^k Heylin's History of the Presbyterians.

^l Adams's View of Religions.

of that country displayed much of the generous, catholic spirit, for which their venerable primate, Usher, has been beloved of all ages and sects ; for they allowed presbyters to assist them in ordinations, and suffered those who disliked the liturgy to conduct the worship according to their own views^m.

^m Neal, vol. II. p. 97.

SECTION II.

OF THE INDEPENDENTS.



THIS communion is distinguished by maintaining every distinct society of Christians, united for religious fellowship and worship, is, according to the scriptures, a church, possessed of full powers to regulate its own concerns, and independent of all foreign controul. In support of this view of the Scripture and ECCLESIA, a church, we refer to a writer distinguished learning and ability, who spent his years in a presbyterian communion. "There are in the New Testament but two original senses of the word which can be called different, though related; the first is when it denotes a number of people actually assembled, or accustomed to assemble together, and is then properly rendered by the English terms congregation, convention, assembly, and even sometimes church. The other sense is, to denote a society united together by some common tie; though not convened, perhaps not convenable, in one place. Where the word is appropriated, as it generally is in the New Testament, by its regimen (as the church of God of Christ) or by the scope of the place, it is always to be explained in one of the two senses now being, corresponding to the two general senses here mentioned. It denotes either a single congregation of Christians, in correspondence to the first, or the whole Christian community, in correspondence

to the second. But in any intermediate sense, between a single congregation and the whole Christian community, which has been called the catholic or universal church, not one instance can be brought of the application of the word in sacred writ."

"We speak now indeed, and this has been the manner for ages, of the Gallican church, the Greek church, the church of England, the church of Scotland, as of societies independent and complete in themselves. Such a phraseology was never adopted in the days of the apostles. They did not say the church of Asia, the church of Macedonia, but the churches of Asia or Macedonia. The plural number is always used when more congregations than one are spoken of, unless the subject be of the whole commonwealth of Christ. This is also the constant usage of the term in the writings of ecclesiastic authors for the two first centuries."

"It adds considerable force to our argument, that this is exactly conformable to the usage which obtained among the Jews. They never called the people belonging to several neighbouring synagogues, a synagogue, or church, in the singular number, but synagogues and churches in the plural. Any other use in the apostles, therefore, must have been as unprecedented as it would have been improper, and what could not fail to lead their hearers into mistakes".

But though the common idea of a national church, composed of all the congregations in a kingdom, is thus exploded as unscriptural; presbyterians plead for what may be called a representative church, consisting of the elders or delegates of several congregations convened together for the exercise of ecclesias-

^a Dr. Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History.

tical discipline: To this also independents object, and for a statement of their reasons we may refer again to the same presbyterian divine.

"I know of no way," says Dr. Campbell, "of reaching the sense of our Lord's instructions, 'tell it to the church,' but by understanding his words so as they must have been understood by his hearers, from the use that then prevailed. The word *ECCLESIA* occurs frequently in the Septuagint, and is that by which the Hebrew word for an assembly or sacred convocation is commonly translated. It is used in the Old Testament in two different but related senses; one is for a whole nation, as constituting one commonwealth or polity, the other is for a particular congregation or assembly, convened in the same place. Now as the nature of the thing sufficiently shows that our Lord did not employ it in the first of the two senses, so as to require that every private quarrel should be made a national affair, we are under a necessity of understanding it in the last, as regarding the particular congregation to which the parties belonged. It would then be contrary to all the rules of criticism to suppose that our Lord used this term in a sense in which it could not be understood by any one of his hearers; or that he would say congregation, for so the word literally imports, when he meant only a few heads or directors." To this we may add, that the English establishment, though founded upon a very different hypothesis, has in one of its articles asserted the principle which forms the main pillar of independency. "The visible church is a congregation of faithful men^p."

^p Campbell on the Gospels.

^p See thirty-nine articles of the church of England, under the article entitled "of the church."

It may now be enquired, of whom, according to the sentiments of independents, are these distinct churches to be composed? Of such persons as the apostles address in their epistles to the first churches. These apostolic letters always consider the Christian churches as composed of men on whom the gospel of Jesus Christ had produced those holy effects, which made them differ from the rest of the world, and from what they themselves formerly were. Here again the language of the established formulary exactly expresses the sentiments of independents, that a church is "a congregation of *faithful* men." Hence they say, a kingdom or parish, comprising all sorts of men who happen to be born within its bounds, whether good or bad, can never, without the greatest perversion of terms, be called a church.

It seems to have been in this sense that the first independents denied the church of England to be a true church, for which they were branded as an illiberal sect, which anathematised all who were not of their communion. But what general would honour with the title of a regiment, or an army, a promiscuous crowd composed principally of men ignorant of all military affairs; though there might be intermingled with them true soldiers, of whom he entertained the highest opinion, as worthy to form a Macedonian phalanx? And though the independents refused to prostitute the name of a church to the promiscuous communion of all who were born and baptized within a district of so many yards or miles, they still believed that there might be among them many excellent persons of whom a church, or congregation of faithful men might have been formed.

Independents maintain the right of the church, or

body of Christians, to determine who shall be admitted into their communion, and also to exclude from their fellowship those who may prove themselves unworthy members. They plead that the right of excommunication is by the lord of the church vested in the congregation of believers, when he says, "if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established; and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church, but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican^a." This exclusion from the fellowship of the church, is all the punishment which an independent deems it lawful to inflict for offences against religion. The fulmination of bitter anathemas, the infliction of civil pains and disabilities, well accord with the spirit of the anti-christian beast; but are totally abhorrent from the temper of Christ, who reigns in Zion "as a lamb in the midst of the throne."

The right of each church to choose all those who bear offices in it, is another important principle for which the independents contend. They agree with presbyterians in maintaining the identity of presbyters and bishops, and believe that a plurality of presbyters, pastors, or bishops in one church is taught in Scripture, rather than the common usage of one bishop over many congregations. In those independent churches, which have more than one pastor or bishop, he whose age, length of standing, virtues, labours, or usefulness, have given him the precedence, becomes,

^a Matt. xviii. 15—17.

what archbishop Usher thought the true primitive bishop, the *primus inter pares*, the first among his equals. This president, or chairman, in the council of elders, Dr. Campbell supposes to be the angel to whom the epistles to the seven churches of Asia were addressed ; for the church of Ephesus had more than one elder, who were all called bishops. Besides the pastors, independent churches elect some from among the brethren, to the office of deacons ; whose duty is to take care of the poor, and in general, of the temporalities of the society.

In tracing the history of this communion, what others would call the origin, independents consider only the revival of their churches. They conceive that the New Testament represents the first Christian churches as formed upon their principles, which were stifled by the early corruptions of Christianity, when the spirit of the world established the domination of a few over the consciences of their brethren. As soon as their emancipation from the yoke of Rome, and the reformation of doctrine, had left to Christians sufficient leisure to attend to discipline, the presbyterian system presented itself as a complete restoration of the primitive regimen of the church. It was, indeed, as considerable a step from the Roman hierarchy as Christians could be expected to take at once ; but some, when advanced thus far, beheld the scene still opening upon them, and inviting them to pursue their course to a mode of discipline as much beyond the presbyterian, as presbytery was preferable to prelacy.

Slander herself wrote the first records of the independents. Fuller, who was an episcopalian, and no

friend to the new sect, acknowledges that "little can be known of them, but from pens which avowedly wrote against them." Various malignant reflections are thrown out against the principles of the independents, on account of the person who is supposed to be their first author. But amidst the ferment of religious contentions, the most impetuous spirits will, sometimes, gain the precedency, in point of time and publicity, while they are yet far behind others in the maturity of their sentiments, or the firmness of their hold. It is generally supposed, that the idea of independency first occurred to one who had not principles to pursue the plan : but it is more probable, that many were cultivating in secret the system, which was first announced to the public, in a crude form, by Robert Brown, from whom the earliest independents were called *Brownists*.

He descended from an ancient and honourable family in Rutlandshire¹, and was educated at Corpus Christi college, Cambridge. Amidst the confusion which reigns in his history, it is difficult to speak with certainty ; but he seems to have chosen, for the first scene of his labours, the city of Norwich, where many Dutch emigrants were settled. Here, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty, among foreigners and natives, he diffused his independent principles with all the zeal, which a new and important discovery usually kindles ; and all the stern severity which, at that period, every party displayed. He has been reviled as an intolerant bigot, for

¹ One of his ancestors was, by a charter of King Henry the eighth, indulged with the singular privilege of wearing his cap in the presence of the king, or his heirs, or any lords spiritual or temporal ; and not to put it off but for his own ease or pleasure.

denying the church of England to be a true church, her ministers to be rightly ordained, or her sacraments valid. But all this is no more than has been retorted upon those who separate from the establishment, by elegant scholars in the nineteenth century, which is thought so much more enlightened and liberal than the age in which Brown lived.

Induced, probably, by the opposition which his principles experienced at home, he removed to Middleburgh, in Zealand, where he formed a church upon his own plan. It was not long, however, before he returned to England, where he was assisted in propagating his sentiments by one Harrison. After having been, by his own declaration, confined to thirty-two prisons, in some of which he could not see his hand at noon; he conformed to the establishment which he had condemned, and died with a very indifferent character, rector of Achurch in Northamptonshire.

But the principles were immortal, and so rapid was their diffusion, that Sir Walter Raleigh said in the parliament of the thirty-fifth year of Elizabeth: "I am afraid there are near twenty thousand of these men; and when they are driven out of the kingdom, who shall support their wives and children?" The field of their labours was rendered fertile by their blood. Elias Thacker and John Copping were hanged at St. Edmund's Bury, for the crime of dispersing what were termed schismatical pamphlets, containing the principles of the Brownists. But several more of these people being imprisoned, the justices, at the quarter-sessions, were moved by their complaints, and gained the triumph of mercy over

the bishops' cruel measures. The names of Sir Robert Jermin, and Sir John Higham; of Robert Ashfield, and Thomas Bradley, Esquires, deserve honourable mention as the leaders in this generous action^a.

While groaning under the arm of power, which pressed most heavily on them for renouncing that communion with the establishment which other puritans yet maintained, they were joined by many eminent men, who risked all that was dear to them in life, in support of what appeared to them the true Christian polity. Among these was a gentleman of the temple, whose name was Barrow, who became so eminent among them, that they were frequently called Barrowists. Ainsworth, a name as dear to learning as to religion, the rabbi of his age, was driven from his country, of which he formed the brightest ornament, for the unpardonable sin of adopting these schismatical opinions. He retired to Holland, where a Mr. Johnson, another independent exile, formed a church, of which Ainsworth was chosen teacher. These two, pursued by calumnies to a foreign shore, published there a confession of faith of the people called Brownists. The rich store of oriental learning, displayed in Ainsworth's Annotations on the Pentateuch and the Psalms, has preserved it to this day, high in the esteem of many who have never heard of his writings in defence of independent principles^x.

^a Neale.

^x This celebrated divine was, in his exile for conscience sake, reduced to live on a few boiled roots, having but ninepence a day for his support. He hired himself as porter to a bookseller, at Amsterdam, who soon discovered the superior learning of his ser-

The independents in London, and its vicinity, formed themselves into a church, in the year one thousand five hundred and ninety-two, at the house of a Mr. Fox, in Nicholas-lane. They chose Mr. Francis Johnson, pastor; Mr. Greenhood, teacher; Messrs. Bowman and Lee, deacons; and Messrs. Studley and Kingston, elders. Several persons were baptized without godfathers or godmothers; and the Lord's Supper was celebrated by the members of the church, who sat or stood, as they judged proper. Aware that they were hunted after by the blood hounds of the high commission, they often changed their place of meeting; but were, at last, discovered at Islington, on the very spot where the protestants met, during the popish persecutions in the reign of Mary.

Fifty-six of them were sent prisoners to different jails about London, where they had the melancholy consolation of finding many of their brethren confined for the same crime of worshipping God in the way they judged most acceptable to him. When

vant, and published his fame, as a man who had more learning in his head than he carried on his shoulders. His death has been variously represented. He had found in the streets of Amsterdam a diamond of great value, for which the Jew who owned it, offered him any acknowledgment which he might require. Though poor, his principles were too elevated to demand a price for giving up what he had no right to keep; so that he only requested a conference with some of the Jewish rabbis on the prophecies of the Old Testament, concerning the Messiah. Some affirm, that the Jew, finding his interest insufficient to procure the conference which he had promised, to free himself from the obligation, poisoned Ainsworth. But others maintain, that the parties met, when Ainsworth so confounded the Jews, that they revenged themselves by his death. He died about the year one thousand six hundred and twenty-two.

they imagined that twelve months confinement had sufficiently broken the spirit of Mr. Smith, they asked him whether he would go to church. He answered, "that were he to do it, he should only play the hypocrite, to avoid trouble; for he judged it utterly unlawful." To this one of the commissioners replied, in a style worthy of his cause: "come to church and obey the queen's laws; and be a dissembler, a hypocrite, or a devil, if thou wilt." In a petition to government, these much-injured men complain of such treatment as was worthy only of a Spanish inquisition. By these cruelties, many of them perished in prison. On the coffin of one of them, whose name was Roger Rippon, his fellow-prisoners inscribed the words of the royal preacher, "oppression makes a wise man mad." They were beaten, and doomed to still severer confinement, for not attending the service of the established church in the jail, to which they were brought for renouncing that service as unscriptural².

Barrow requested that he might be allowed a conference, to investigate the truth. But this was refused; for it was not truth or reason, but submission, which the persecutors wished to obtain. On his trial, Mr. Barrow was asked, whether the church of England were a true church or not; he replied, "as it is now formed, it is not; but there are many excellent Christians who belong to its communion." He, as well as Mr. Greenwood, his companion in suffering, refused to take an oath, but engaged to deliver the truth. They both returned similar answers to the frivolous questions on which they were tried for their lives.

¹ Neale.² Neale.

They were condemned to die, and on the sixth of April one thousand five hundred and ninety-three were hanged at Tyburn, breathing such a spirit of piety towards God, and such loyal prayers for the queen's prosperity, that when she was told in what manner they died, she discovered a momentary pang of regret^a.

Shortly after, Mr. John Penry, or, more probably, ap Henry, was seized and condemned for the same crime. He had drawn up a petition, which discovers surprising penetration, and announces some incontrovertable truths in a most convincing tone. Yet should not the man who could see and speak truth so clearly, have been aware, that to present such a petition to the imperious Elizabeth was to march with the forlorn hope to storm the deadly breach? Though he declared, that not a day passed over his head, in which he did not commend the queen's estate to God, his death-warrant was signed by the archbishop. It was immediately sent to the sheriff, who erected the gallows the same day, seized the victim at dinner, and hanged him about five o'clock in the afternoon of May the twenty-ninth, in the year one thousand five hundred and ninety-three^b.

An important æra in the history of the independents, is supposed to have been formed by the labours of Mr. John Robinson, who gathered a church on these principles at Leyden. He began with the most rigid sentiments, but from intercourse with the learned congregationalist, Dr. William Ames, he imbibed more liberal views. In a Latin apology, which he published, he says, "every particular society is a complete church; and, as far as regards other

^a Pierce. Fuller.

^b Heylin's History of Presbyterians.

churches, immediately and independently under Christ alone." This gave rise to the name of independents, of whom Mr. Robinson has been considered the father; but as it does not appear that he made any material alteration in the system, the earliest Brownists may, with the utmost propriety, be called independents.

The church at Leyden gradually diminished; for while the aged members were removed by death, their children married into Dutch families: it was therefore determined, after much consultation, that the younger part of them should remove to America, where they might at once preserve their church from extinction, and afford an asylum to their brethren from England. This independent colony settled at Plymouth in New England, where they at first endured incredible hardships from famine and the hostile neighbourhood of the Indians. That part of the church, which remained at Leyden, felt no encouragement to follow their brethren, though Mr. Robinson was willing, if the majority would have given their consent. At length, an ague deprived them of this beloved pastor, and dismissed him to his rest on the nineteenth of February, one thousand six hundred and twenty-four, in the fiftieth year of his age. The Dutch ministers and professors, though presbyterians, highly esteemed this champion of independency while living, and at his death accompanied him to the grave, with every mark of affectionate regret.*

Those, who emigrated to New England, waited for the remainder of the church with Mr. Robinson their pastor, till they heard of his death, when they chose to that office Mr. Ralph Smith, who went over about this

* Neal.

time, and was ordained in the year one thousand six hundred and twenty-nine by fasting and prayer, and the imposition of the hands of the elders of the church. They much encouraged the preaching of the gifted brethren, by which they suffered some disturbances, till by degrees the chosen pastors became the only preachers.

In England Mr. Henry Jacob became a distinguished supporter of independency. He was at first the apologist of the church of England, in favour of which he published two treatises against Francis Johnson. But on conversing with Mr. Robinson at Leyden, he became a convert to his sentiments, recommended them by the press in Holland, and came over to England to reduce them to practice. He called together his puritan friends, communicated to them his design of forming a separate church, like those in Holland, which they, seeing no prospect of further reformation in the establishment, approved. They spent a day of solemn devotion to implore the the divine blessing on their undertaking, when, after a confession of their faith, they joined their hands together, and covenanted with each other to walk together in all the ordinances of God, as far as he had already revealed, or should further make them known. Mr. Jacob, being chosen their pastor, published a statement and defence of their principles, and petitioned the king for a toleration. But after labouring among them eight years, to extend the sphere of his usefulness, in the year one thousand six hundred and twenty-four, with the consent of his charge, he removed to Virginia.^d

Afterwards the church chose Mr. John Lathorpe, formerly a clergyman in Kent, to be their pastor; and

^d Neal,

continued to worship in secret, removing from place to place, for near thirty years. At last they were surprised in a house near Blackfriars. Forty of them were dragged to prison, and by these persecutions they were deprived of several pastors, till they chose to the office Mr. Stephen More, a wealthy citizen of London. Growing bold by the favour which the long parliament showed to dissenters, they worshipped with open doors, when they were disturbed in Deadman's-lane, Southwark, January the eighteenth, one thousand six hundred and forty, and being summoned before the house of Lords, they were dismissed with a gentle reprimand. Some of the peers, curious to see their order, attended their worship the following Lord's-day, when they professed themselves much pleased with the administration of the word and sacraments, and contributed towards their collection for the poor of the church.

The independent divines who had fled to Holland, were allowed to assemble in the Dutch churches, after the hours of the national worship, with the use of a bell to summon the congregation together. Here they declared that they availed themselves of the liberty and leisure of their exile to study the doctrine of the Scriptures concerning church government. But when the change of the times invited their return, and afforded an opportunity for the declaration of their principles, they published an apologetical narration which they presented to the house of commons in the year one thousand six hundred and forty-three. This apology was signed by seven ministers, who being members of the presbyterian assembly, were called the dissenting brethren. The presbyterians, who

were now labouring hard to establish their discipline, in the place of the old hierarchy, were much offended with this step, which tended to obstruct their schemes.

The parliament gladly seized the opportunity to elude the shackles of a new ecclesiastical establishment, and appointed what was called the grand committee of accommodation, to accomplish an union between the two parties, if possible ; but if not, to contrive some way in which the independents might enjoy liberty.

These efforts for accommodation came to nothing ; for such was the temper of the presbyterians, that they reflect severely on the independents for asserting that uniformity ought to be pressed no further than is agreeable to the consciences of men, and the general edification. It seems to us, said the dominant party, that the independent brethren desire liberty, not only for themselves, but for all men. Hence they call toleration the great Diana of the independents^f. Would God that no worse idol had ever been adored ! It is the distinguished glory of the independents to have first recommended a principle so noble as religious liberty to the esteem of the world. Were Britain to erect a statue of gold to the memory of the first patrons of this sentiment, she would but imperfectly discharge the debt she owes to those who have been the source of her wealth, her strength, and her glory.

The intolerance of the presbyterians received its just punishment, in the disgust with which it inspired the nation, and the ruin with which it overwhelmed their cause. The leading men in the army either avowed themselves independents, or patrons of that toleration,

^f Neale, Pierce.

which had been denounced as the idol of this communion.

When Cromwell espoused the same cause, and nominated their principal divines to be his chaplains, as well as to fill the most important places in the universities, their triumph was complete. Yet in the plenitude of their power, liberty, and not authority, was their aim. Their churches were voluntary associations supported only by the influence of their principles, while the presbyterians enjoyed the revenues appropriated by the nation to the endowment of religion^s.

While general Monk was in Scotland, commissioners were sent into that country, who being chiefly independents, encouraged their friends to present to the general assembly at Edinburgh a declaration in favour of congregational churches and religious toleration^b. This was attacking presbytery in its strong hold, but what might not be attempted by those who had Cromwell and the army on their side? As their churches had much increased in England, they requested leave of the government

^s Dr. Owen, while dean of Christchurch, and vice-chancellor of Oxford, presented the livings in his gift to the presbyterians. Dr. Thomas Goodwin, who was an independent, and one of the dissenting brethren in the assembly of divines, was made president of Magdalen college, Oxford, where he formed an independent church, of which the celebrated Theophilus Gale, and Stephen Charnock were members. Mr. John Howe, who was then a student in the college, and known to be an independent, was asked, why he did not join them? To which he replied, "because you lay more stress upon some peculiarities, than I approve: if you will admit me upon catholic principles, I will gladly unite with you." Dr. Goodwin's consent is an instance of greater liberality, than he was thought to have possessed. *Howe's Life*.

^b Neale.

to hold a synod, in order to publish to the world an account of their faith and order. To this the protector consented with apparent reluctance, apologizing for it to the presbyterians as necessary to be granted, in order to prevent the effusion of blood again. He died before the meeting of the synod, which was held at the Savoy, October the twelfth, in the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-eight¹.

The pastors and delegates of more than a hundred congregational churches being assembled, deputed Dr. Thomas Goodwin, Dr. Owen, Mr. Philip Nye, Mr. William Bridge, Mr. Joseph Caryle, and Mr. William Greenhill, to draw up their confession of faith. It much resembles the assembly's catechism, but has for an appendix, a chapter on the institution of churches, and the order appointed by Jesus Christ, in which the great principles of independents are asserted.

At the restoration, the presbyterians struggled to obtain a comprehension within the episcopal establishment, from which the independents were by their principles excluded. When Venner, and his fifth monarchy men, raised an insurrection in London, though the independents were so much hated that the government would gladly have seized the opportunity to glut its revenge, they were so much dreaded for their determined courage, and unrivalled address, that the royal proclamation, by a crooked policy, turned the vengeance on weaker parties, the quakers and baptists. Shortly after appeared from the press "a renunciation and declaration of the congregational churches and public preachers in and about London against the late horrid insurrection."

¹ Neale,

SECTION III.

OF THE BAPTISTS.

It is sufficiently apparent, by their name, that this denomination of Dissenters differs from others on the subject of baptism. They believe, that the original word, which the New Testament employs to express this religious rite, necessarily conveys the idea of immersion, or plunging the whole body under water; hence they conclude, that sprinkling, affusion, or pouring of water, is not baptizing. To this distinguishing sentiment and practice concerning the *mode*, they add another, which relates to the proper *subjects* of baptism. While others maintain that not only believers, but their seed also, have a right to baptism, according to the new covenant; baptists contend that only those who make a personal profession of their faith in Christ, are entitled to the initiatory ordinance of his religion.

From this last part of their sentiments, it has been thought more correct to denominate them antipædobaptists, or opposers of infant baptism; but this term is defective, as it includes no notice of their opinion concerning baptism by immersion. They were formerly called anabaptists, or rebaptizers, to which they object, as a term of reproach, intended to convey an illiberal reflection; for they never baptise any person more than once, and those whom they admit to this ordinance, were not, according to their views, bap-

tized before. Yet many deny the propriety of the name baptist, by which they are now generally known; since it seems to imply that they alone practise true scriptural baptism, which their opponents by no means admit.

That the distinguishing names of the various communions, into which the Christian church is unhappily divided, fail to convey just views of their differences still further appears, from the consideration, that the baptists may as properly be denominated independents, as those to whom that name has been appropriated. Each of these bodies has from their origin, agreed in their views of the nature, constitution, and government of the Christian church*. As they rose into notice about the same time, and formed themselves into distinct communions, under the same oppressions and discouragements, their agreement in views of discipline so opposed to the dominant hierarchy, drew closer their bonds of attachment, and produced a disposition to afford mutual support.

Those, however, who differ from other Christians, on the subject of baptism, are divided among themselves on doctrinal points, and form two branches, which are called *general* and *particular* baptists, though they would be better known by the names of Calvinists and Armenians. The general baptists, who maintain the doctrine of universal redemption, without any individual election to eternal life, are,

* What reason can be assigned for the singular fact that baptists have universally been strict independents? In the nature of things there might have been episcopalian, or presbyterian baptists. But we read of only one solitary instance, Mr. Tombes, who was willing to have conformed to the episcopal establishment in every point but that of baptism.

by much, the smaller portion. The great majority of baptists believe the doctrines which are usually called calvinistic, of which the election of particular persons being one, they are called particular baptists.

There was a subdivision, which was denominated, the seventh-day baptists ; because they believed that the seventh day of the week should still be sanctified by Christians as a Sabbath. Of these there are now but few.

Some baptists, upon the liberal consideration that those who differ from them conceive themselves baptized, admit them to the Lord's supper, which is called open, or more properly, mixed communion. As those independents, who practise infant baptism, generally admit baptists to their communion ; in some churches there has been such an intermixture, both of pastors and of members, that it would be difficult to know under which denomination they should be classed¹.

In tracing up the history of the baptists to their origin, those who hold their sentiments would ascend to the first churches planted by the labours of the inspired apostles: but those who conceive infant baptism to be authorised by Scripture, must, of course, deny them the honours of an antiquity so high and sacred. Richard Baxter, who will not be suspected of favouring their system, grants, however, that, in the ancient church, while the baptism of infants was esteemed lawful, there were some who, with Tertullian and Nazianzen, thought it better to make no haste. " Nothing more free (says he) than baptism in primitive times. To some it was admi-

¹ See J. Ryland's funeral sermon for Joshua Symmonds, and J. Sutcliff's account of the Bedford church at the end of it.

nistered in infancy ; to some at ripe age ; and to some a little before death.^m Crosby, whom we may call the baptists' own historian, has indeed unequivocally claimed the suffrage of the ancients, as decisively in favour of his communion. But on this, as well as on other subjects, the study of antiquity is an inextricable maze ; and to consult, what are called, the fathers, is to ask counsel at an oracle, whose response is usually of ambiguous import. There were, however, early indications of a difference among Christians on the rite of baptism ; and such is the nature of the argument, that the well-informed and liberal, on both sides, will not be surprised that this difference should early arise, and be still maintained. It is said, that among the Waldenses there were some baptists. But the first notice of them, as a distinct communion, is about the time of the reformation by Luther.

By the triumphs of the Saxon reformer, many were inspired with courage to avow openly the opinions, which they had otherwise been content to foster in secret. And to those who reflect on the appearance of mystical incantation, with which the church of Rome administered baptism, and their revolting dogma of the damnation of all infants who died unbaptized, it can excite no surprise that reasonable men should spurn at a ceremony which had lost every characteristic of the religion of Jesus. Some of those who rejected infant baptism, finding that the reformers were no more willing to allow others to differ from them than the bigoted catholics, joined themselves with the peasants, whom the oppressions of the feudal system had roused to arms. A foreign

^m Baxter's *Life and Times*, by Calamy, p. 115.

writer, who seems to have taken great pains to amass intelligence on the subject^a, affirms, that Nicholas Storch, Mark Stubner, and Thomas Munzer, founded the sect in the year one thousand five hundred and twenty-one. They are said to have been distinguished not only by denying the validity of infant baptism, and thus baptizing according to their own mode, all who joined their communion, but also by peculiar notions of Christian liberty, or exemption from authority, both ecclesiastical and civil. But it is most probable that this latter part of their tenets has been mistaken by enemies, who were more eager to receive and propagate evil reports, than to examine into their truth.

The insurrection of the German peasants was evidently occasioned by that intolerable "oppression which will make a wise man mad;" and as it was at first distinct from all questions of religion, nothing but the coincidence of time and place gave their enemies an opportunity of confounding them with the sect of baptists. Some of those peasants who took arms, probably were of that communion; and the confusion occasioned by the civil war opened a field for the propagation of their tenets, which they took care to improve. Their principles spread with rapidity over many parts of Germany, and extended also to Moravia and Switzerland. The reformers, forgetting their own differences, wrote against the rising sect with an unanimity produced by the consciousness, that the protestant doctrine was charged with all the irregularities, of which the anabaptists were supposed to be guilty. Luther, from whose writings they were said to have derived the germ of

^a Bayle Dictionaire au mot Anabaptist.

their principles, thundered against them with all the heat of his genius.

But when the leaders of the protestants, who were themselves scarcely out of the reach of the inquisition, found that their opponents would not yield to the force of their arguments, they employed the last reason of kings, the secular sword, to exterminate the rising sect. This produced reaction. At Munster, an imperial city in Westphalia, the brethren rose, seized the arsenal and senate-house in the night, and running through the streets with drawn swords, cried, "repent, and be baptized: depart, ye ungodly." The senators and principal citizens, both protestants and catholics, fled and left the city to their untroubled dominion. Here they are said to have rushed from fanatical austerities to boundless licentiousness^a.

While, however, this is usually recorded as a striking feature in the history of this denomination of Christians, it seems that their distinguishing sentiments had little or no share in these transactions. The brethren of Friezland and Holland condemned those of Munster, and continued to propagate their own sentiments of baptism, in a manner which proves that mankind could not reasonably identify the opinions of the baptists with the licentious tenets of the insurgents at Munster.

But this communion received its most important accession, in the year one thousand five hundred and thirty-six, when Menno Simon, a native of Friezland, renounced the church of Rome, of which he had been a priest, and joined the baptists, who received from him the name of Menonites. He was a man of eminent worth, and his indefatigable labours were

^a Bayle. Robertson's History of Charles the fifth.

crowned with distinguished success ; as well in correcting the internal discipline, and sentiments of the society, as in procuring for those sentiments a more extensive adoption. In the united provinces especially, their numbers were great, and their reputation high^p, notwithstanding their subdivisions under various names.

Some writers have expressed their surprise at what they supposed a singular revolution in this society, from opinions productive of outrageous licentiousness, to the most inoffensive tenets, and exemplary virtues. Yet, is it not more probable that the baptists, as such, never adopted any principles hostile to morals, or the social order ; but that prejudice and enmity availed themselves of the enormities committed by some who agreed with this society in certain points, to blast the reputation of the whole body ?

While the sword of persecution pursued the baptists on the continent of Europe, some of them fled to England, where the opposition of Henry the eighth to the papal see, encouraged them to hope that they should enjoy the same liberty of religion which the monarch claimed for himself. In him, however, they found a secular pope ; for in the year one thousand five hundred and thirty-five, fourteen Hollanders, accused of being anabaptists, were put to death, and ten others escaped the same fate,

^p The principles on which the States of Holland tolerated this defamed sect, may be learned from a conversation, which the Dutch ambassador, Van Beuning, held with the celebrated M. de Turrenne. "Why should you wish," said the ambassador, "that we would not tolerate them ? They are the best and most convenient people in the world. They never aspire to posts of honour, nor rival us in glory. One could wish that, every where, half the

only by recantation¹. As this sect was supposed to include all that was vile, the arbitrary, unfeeling tyrant indiscriminately branded with the name those whom he doomed to death, though some of the martyrs avowed at the stake their abhorrence of those tenets with which they were charged. Thirty persons were, at one time, in the year one thousand five hundred and thirty-nine, banished for opposing the baptism of infants. Fleeing to Delft, in Holland, which was then under the yoke of Charles the fifth, the men were beheaded, and the women drowned.

During the reign of Edward the sixth, among those who fled from Germany on account of the rustic war, there were some who went by the name of anabaptists. Of this a complaint was made to the council, which issued out a commission to several bishops and other persons "to try all anabaptists, heretics, and despisers of the common prayer." In tender compassion, they were first to attempt the conversion of the accused by force of argument; but if they failed here, they were to employ the flames of death. Cranmer, being at the head of this protestant inquisition, gave his enemies too much reason for saying, that his own cruel death was but just retaliation.

inhabitants would decline public offices, there would be more chance for the other half. We have no fear from a sect which maintains the unlawfulness of bearing arms. The Menonites pay their taxes, and with the money we levy troops, who do us more service than they would. They apply themselves to business, and enrich the state by their industry, without injuring it by the expense and contagion of their dissipations. But they refuse to take an oath! Terrible crime! They are as much bound by their word and promise as if they swore." Bayle.

¹ Fox apud Crosby, vol. I. p. 40.

The fires of Smithfield, which, during the reign of Mary, consumed many of these commissioners, avenged the cause of the much injured baptists; though they were themselves equally exposed to the flames. On the accession of Elizabeth, baptists, as well as other dissenters, much increased; and notwithstanding Fuller's exultation, "that our countrymen were free from the infection;" it is highly probable that Englishmen, as well as foreigners, were found in their societies. On Easter day, one thousand five hundred and seventy-five, was discovered a congregation of Dutch anabaptists, at Aldgate, London. Many were imprisoned, and four of them, bearing faggots, made their recantation at Paul's Cross. Next month, eight Dutch women were banished; but two, for their peculiar obstinacy, were sentenced to be burned. The letter, which Fox wrote to Elizabeth on their behalf, we have already mentioned, to his honour, and her disgrace.

At length the baptists, banished from England by the proclamation of Elizabeth, fled to Holland. Here they were at first in communion with the brownist, or independent churches; but the difference of their sentiments having created dissensions, they separated and formed distinct churches. The learned Ainsworth had been some time pastor of the independent church at Amsterdam, when they were joined by Mr. John Smith, who had been a minister of the church of England, but left both his living and his native land from dislike to the principles of the hierarchy. Mr. Smith, having declared his objections to infant-baptism, was opposed by Ainsworth, and by Robinson, pastor of the independents at Leyden. Many controversial pieces were published on both sides, which

betray the same irritation of mind as in modern times has been excited by this much disputed point.

As Mr. Smith thought there was no one at the time duly qualified to administer the ordinance, he baptized himself, for which he was called a *se-baptist*.^r He afterwards adopted the sentiments of the arminians, and became the father of the general baptists. This subdivision published, about the year one thousand six hundred and eleven, a confession of faith, which diverges much farther from calvinism than those who are now called arminians would approve.

The baptists are mentioned as a distinct sect in this country, as early as the year one thousand six hundred and eight; for Enoch Clapham, writing against those whom he calls sectaries, charges them with separating, not only from the established church, but from the brownists or other puritans, and retiring to worship in woods, and plant churches in foreign lands. Some, on meeting to form themselves into a baptist church, felt the same difficulty which had induced Mr. Smith to baptize himself: but they adopted a different method to extricate themselves from the embarrassment. They sent Mr. Richard Blount, who understood the Dutch language, to a baptist church in Holland. Having been baptized according to his own views, he returned and administered the ordinance to Mr. Samuel Blacklock, a minister. By these two, all

^r Crosby.

^s Many of their persuasion, however, condemn this as an unnecessary expedition, which was undertaken with the popish notion that the validity of sacraments depends on their regular transmission, in an unbroken succession, from the apostles. It is thought, that lost ordinances may be recovered by an unbaptized person baptizing

the rest of the society; about fifty persons, were baptized.*

It is supposed that the first treatise against the baptism of infants, which appeared in the English language, was the translation of a book written in Dutch, and presented to the British public in the year one thousand six hundred and eighteen. Previously to this, however, the baptists had defended their own sentiments from the press, and published to the world a confession of their faith. They presented also to king James, and his parliament, a humble supplication, in which they vindicate their sentiments concerning civil government, and sign themselves "those who are unjustly called anabaptists'."

The baptists now began to appear as a distinct member of the puritan body. The independent congregation, of which Mr. Henry Jacob was pastor, having become very numerous, was in the year one thousand six hundred and sixteen divided into several churches; and those of them, who adopted the principles of the baptists, chose Mr. John Spilsbury for their pastor." But this separation from the independent churches, in order to form a communion distinguished from them only by their peculiar views of baptism, naturally kindled the flames of controversy. Those, who at first condemned their departure from the establishment, had defended infant baptism with human traditions; but when the independents, who admitted that the Scriptures were the only rule of faith and

others. For who can prove that the apostles themselves were baptized, before they administered that ordinance to other believers? Crosby, p. 100.

* Crosby.

" Crosby.

practice, entered the lists. Crosby owns that the baptists had to contend with much mightier champions.

When the long parliament wrested from the hands of Laud the crosier, which he had employed as a rod of iron to crush all freedom of opinion, the baptists came forth to defend their cause on a more public stage. A species of ecclesiastical chivalry was the fashion of the day. Divines selected as the champions of their respective parties met in these consecrated lists to determine by single combat the merits of their cause. The baptists with all the ardour of recent conviction, and confident of the superior temper of their weapons, eagerly threw down the gauntlet, and by frequent exercise, became skilful fencers in these bloodless duels.

Dr. Featly, a divine of the established church, was one of the first opponents of the rising sect. He contended against four persons, and by his own confession wrote the record of the conflict with a pen dipped in gall.* Shortly after this, Mr. Baxter says, he first became acquainted with the baptists. Some young men had submitted to immersion, and joined a church, which the famous Mr. Tombes had formed at Bewdley, a few miles from Kidderminster. They endeavoured in vain to draw Mr. Baxter into a paper war with Mr. Tombes, but at length a public disputation between these two leading men was appointed. They met in the parish church at Bewdley, and disputed from nine in the morning till five in the evening. On Mr. Baxter's side it was said, that this contest satisfied, not only the inhabitants of Kidderminster, but also Mr. Tombe's own townsmen,

* Crosby, vol. I. p. 153.

except about twenty, who composed his church. But as all such public tournaments are most unhappily calculated to make men contend for victory, rather than truth, so both sides claim the victory as their own, which was the case in the battle of Bewdley.^y

While the baptists were struggling for the establishment and diffusion of their principles, the quakers arose, with most decided hostility to what they called water-baptism. Hence these two parties, from their origin, stood peculiarly opposed to each other; for to contend in behalf of the exclusive baptism of believers by immersion, would be a nugatory warfare, if George Fox and his followers could prove that the only Christian baptism was that of the Spirit.

A public dispute was held at High Wycomb, Bucks, in the year one thousand six hundred and seventy, between a baptist and a quaker.^z Four years after they persecuted each other with books, of which the bitter titles excite deep regret, that the sufferings which they both endured, had not taught them more respect for their companions in tribulation.^a William Penn, irritated by the charges which a baptist had preferred against the friends, appealed to the whole body for justice. To rouse their attention, Penn's book was given away at the doors of the baptist meeting-houses. But after an examination, the baptists pronounced their champion innocent. The quakers, however, deny that the affair received an impartial investigation.^b

^y Baxter's Own Life.

^z Crosby vol. II. p. 231.

^a Crosby vol. II. p. 294.

^b Crosby's History of the Baptists, vol. II. p. 295. Gough's History of the Quakers, vol II. p. 368.

The baptists endured conflicts more severe. Mr. Henry Denne was by the long parliament imprisoned for preaching against infant baptism, and for acting upon what appeared to him more scriptural principles. This, and too many other instances, painfully prove, that instead of the unbounded sectarian license, which is supposed to have been the sin of those times; the vile spirit of intolerance still usurped the throne of deity, by attempting to rule in the empire of conscience and religion.

After the senate had published what we may term an apology for the sectaries, it published a most disgraceful ordinance, which denounced severe penalties on certain opinions, among which the denial of infant baptism was distinctly enumerated. This law was found too vile to be executed. When Cromwell was rising into power, having determined, for political reasons, to cashier the officers of his regiment, he assigned what he thought would be the least odious pretence, that they were anabaptists. Yet in the general tenour of his government, the protector merited that title for his conduct towards the baptists, whom the advocates for *covenant uniformity* longed to crush.

At the restoration, major-general Harrison, who was of this communion, being condemned as one of the regicides, died, not merely with calmness, but with joy. Venner's insurrection was the signal for a general persecution of the baptists. Though Mr. Henry Jesse shortly after declared, that Venner himself said, "there was not one baptist in his party, and that if they succeeded, the baptists should know that infant baptism was an ordinance of Jesus Christ^c."

^c Crosby.

A congregation of seventh-day baptists in London was disturbed, and the preacher, Mr. John James, was accused by a despicable wretch of uttering treasonable words. Though it was solemnly sworn by those who were present that the words were never uttered, he was condemned. His wife presented a petition to Charles, who, on hearing the name of the petitioner, said, "O, Mr. James, he is a sweet gentleman." But he afterwards so completely changed his tone as to say, "the rogue shall be hanged," For once the king remembered his promise, and Mr. James was sent to join the noble army of martyrs^d.

Upon the infamous statute of Elizabeth, ten men and two women, taken at a meeting near Aylesbury, were required to conform to the establishment, or abjure the realm. Declaring that they could do neither, they threw themselves on the mercy of the court: but as the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel, they were condemned to die. Aylesbury was thrown into the utmost alarm at the bloody sentence; for the rest of the dissenters, who were the principal part of the inhabitants, expecting that their turn would come next, shut up their shops, and abandoned all attention to business. The son of one of the condemned persons rode up to London, where he laid the case before Mr. William Kiffin, who, though a baptist, had some interest at court. When chancellor Hyde laid the case before his majesty, Charles seemed much surprised, and promised his royal pardon. But as the son was afraid his father would be pardoned after he was hanged, he begged for an immediate re-

^d Crosby.

prieve; which having obtained, he returned with sufficient speed to save these devoted lives^c.

^c Among numerous instances of faithful suffering for God, and almost miraculous interposition of providence in behalf of the oppressed, we can only record the case of Mr. Andrew Gifford. He was a baptist minister of high repute in the west of England. At Bristol, the principal field of his labours, he was three times confined in Newgate, and once was hurried away to Gloucester. He had been preaching among the colliers in the forest of Kingswood, near Bristol, where his son, who was the centinel, was prevented from giving notice of the approach of the informers, by being frozen to the ground. An independent minister, who, pursued by the same harpies, had been preaching in another part of the wood, lost his life in attempting to escape across a river: But the colliers hearing that Mr. Gifford was taken, rose in arms for his deliverance. This, however, he declined, saying, that he would rather leave his cause with God, who, he doubted not, would order all for the best. The justices gave him permission to visit his wife, who was near lying in, and to settle his affairs. But the informers, as soon as he reached home, seized him and hurried him away to Gloucester, a distance of thirty miles. Thus it was ordered, that he entered the castle, just as the public chimes announced twelve o'clock at night. When the six months, for which his mittimus had condemned him, was expired, he desired to be dismissed. The keeper objected that it was unusual to open the gates at midnight, to which Mr. G. replied, that they were opened at that hour to let him in, and therefore why should they not to let him out? He was discharged, and the next morning at six o'clock, arrived an express from London, with an order to confine him during life, from which hard fate he escaped by the relentless fury of his enemies, who hurried him away to prison at midnight. Crosby.

SECTION IV.

OF THE QUAKERS.

THIS was originally a term of reproach ; but it is now generally employed to distinguish an important and singular body of dissenters from the establishment, when no disrespect is intended. They call each other by the name of friends, deriving it from the scriptural word, which is translated beloved, and equally signifies *friends*. But George Fox having charged Gervas Bennet, Esq. one of the justices of Derby, to tremble at the word of the Lord ; and many of them discovering great agitations of body, arising from the emotions of their minds, they received the name of quakers. There is no denomination of Christians whose principles render them so conspicuous as the friends.

They are chiefly distinguished by their opinions concerning the Holy Spirit, and his influences. Maintaining what are called arminian doctrines, they believe that a portion of the Holy Spirit is imparted to every child of Adam. This divine principle they call by the various names of the seed, the light, the power, the word within. The sacred gift they suppose, is committed to the free-will of every man to improve ; and notwithstanding the depravation of human nature by the fall, they affirm, that every one may so improve this heavenly gift, as to be led by it to perfection, even in this life.

† Gough's History of the Quakers, vol. I. p. 96.

To this light, or word within, they seem to appeal, rather than to the written volume of *Revelation*, for which, however, they avow a high regard. They profess to wait the impulse of the Spirit in every affair; but especially in all that concerns religion, or the worship of God. Hence they have no certain order in their devotions, either public or private. In their assemblies, no bible, nor any other book, is seen: sometimes prayer is heard, and sometimes preaching; but frequently, instead of either, a total silence is maintained. In their families we perceive no domestic worship, nor any external acknowledgment of God, by giving thanks at meals.

They practise neither baptism, nor the Lord's supper; affirming, that the baptism of the Spirit is all that Christ intended to institute in his church; and that Christians should seek only a spiritual, or mystical feast. Though they conform to the usual custom of assembling for public worship every Lord's-day, it appears that they have no regard to this day, as divinely appropriated to religious use beyond others. No one is distinguished among them as a minister by any particular dress, nor are any excluded from officiating in prayer or preaching; but every one speaks according to what he conceives the divine influence upon his mind. Yet their worship is not entirely left to the caprice or presumption of every individual. They differ also from other Christians, by allowing women, as well as men, to be ministers and public preachers.

Their public worship is often exposed to illiberal ridicule; not only by the profound silence which sometimes reigns through the whole season, but also by the singularity of their tones and manner, both in

prayer and exhorting. A late apologist ascribes this to nature, which, in speaking out of the ordinary key of conversation to a large number, will fall into unpleasant sounds, without the aid of art, which others employ to correct the evil, but the use of which quakers deem unlawful in the worship of the Deity, where the divine Spirit should fill and actuate all the powers². The singing of psalms and hymns, which most Christians deem a scriptural and profitable, as well as highly delightful part of worship, the society of friends rejects.

Abhorring the secularization of religion by the alliance of the church with the state, they protest against every interference of the magistrate in religion, farther than to protect the subject in the peaceable enjoyment of his principles, as a criminal encroachment upon the rights of God and conscience. Other dissenters condemn tythes, but quakers alone refuse to pay them, or what are called church-rates: on which account they constantly suffer considerable inconvenience and loss by the seizure of their goods. As they account it unlawful for Christians to take an oath, by their firm adherence to their principles, they have obtained, from some more liberal governments, the singular privilege of having their affirmation admitted in evidence at law; though the laws of England have not extended this to *criminal* cases. They forbid the members of their society to go to law with each other, and thus settle all differences in a much better way, by arbitrators chosen from among themselves. Strenuously avoiding all acknowledgment of established priests, they perform the ceremony of marriage in their own

² Clarkson's Portraiture of Quakerism.

places of worship, and forbid marriages with any who are not of their own society, on pain of *disownment*, or excommunication. Their speech is peculiar to themselves. Condemning all flattering titles of honour; such as your majesty, or your honour; and believing that the use of the plural number, when addressing a single person, originated in puerile vanity, they invariably employ the singular *thee* and *thou* to a single individual, even though it should be the king himself. All those professions of respect or kindness, which, though current in society, appear to them unmeaning, or insincere, they reject, and cultivate so much circumspection in speech as produces singular taciturnity. Instead of the ordinary names of the days and months, which they abhor as relics of paganism; they adopt the ordinal numbers, calling Saturday the seventh-day, and January the first month. In this, however, they were not so singular at first as they appear now; for, in the age of George Fox, many religious persons, who were not quakers, adopted the same practice, especially the independents, and still more so the baptists.

Quakers are known also by their dress. The founders of the society imitated the dress of the plainest persons in their day; so that they were not singular though plain: but as their successors adhered, for a long time, to the dress of their forefathers, while all around were much altered, they became, at length, as remarkable in their appearance as though they had been foreigners in the land. A green apron, which was worn by grave matrons in the seventeenth century, became the distinguishing badge of a quaker in the nineteenth; though it is

said, the last person in the society who retained this singularity is lately deceased. The men sit with their hats on in public worship : but when any one rises to address the assembly, he uncovers his head, and no one wears his hat during the time of prayer. Viewing it as a mark of homage to the Deity, they will never suffer others to share this honour with him, by taking off their hats to any mortal. War they detest as unlawful to Christians ; so that they never take arms, either offensive or defensive.

As their ministers are not distinguished by any particular dress or title, it has been generally supposed that they have none ; but there are among them, both male and female ministers. It is, however, difficult for a stranger exactly to ascertain their office ; and they are supported by the society only when travelling in the exercise of their ministry. Elders also are chosen to govern the body. These not only inspect the conduct of the private members of the society, and compose the courts or meetings for discipline, but also watch over the doctrine of the ministers, and the public devotions of the society. Deacons are appointed to take care of the poor.

In their ecclesiastical discipline, they may be called presbyterians ; for they have a regular gradation of courts, ascending from the single, or monthly meeting, which corresponds to the kirk session, or presbytery, and terminating in the yearly meeting, which is the *dernier resort* ; and answers to the general assembly of the church of Scotland. To trace this discipline through all its ramifications would be difficult and tedious : a very hasty sketch of their sacred polity is all that can be attempted.

Besides the regulations of each congregation, or

meeting, as they call it, there are monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings for discipline. A monthly meeting is composed of several particular congregations, within a certain district: it attends to the poor; the education of youth; the reception of new members; the conduct of those who are disorderly; and gives certificates of membership to those who travel. Each monthly meeting appoints also certain persons called overseers, to see that the discipline of the society is maintained inviolate.

Several of these monthly compose a quarterly meeting. Here are produced written answers to certain queries, concerning the conduct of the members, and the attention of the monthly meetings. These are digested into one report, and sent from the quarterly to the annual meeting. Here also are received appeals from the decisions of the monthly meetings.

The yearly meeting has the general superintendence of the country in which it is held. There are seven of these in the society. To the one which is held in London, about the month of May, are sent delegates from every part of Great Britain and Ireland. The other yearly meetings are held in the United States of America. This court receives appeals from the several quarterly meetings, and publishes a pastoral admonition to the society, which is called the yearly epistle.

The annual meeting appoints what may be called committees. That which is denominated the second day morning-meeting, revises all manuscripts concerning the principles of the friends, previously to their publication. The yearly-meeting, which was held in London in the year one thousand seven hundred and sixty-five, appointed a meeting to

be held in that city, to advise and assist in cases of suffering for conscience sake. This, which is called the meeting for sufferings, being a standing committee, has the care of several important concerns, which may occur during the intervals of the annual meetings. It is proper to observe, that as there are female ministers in this society, they have their separate meetings, in which the concerns of the sisters are regulated, though still subject to the final decision of the brethren.

As this communion of dissenters rose into existence, when some others were in maturity, that part of their history which occurs in this division of our work will be comparatively short. The father and founder of the society was George Fox, who was born in the year one thousand six hundred and twenty-four, at Drayton, in Leicestershire^a. His parents, who were reputable, upright people, apprenticed him to a person who dealt in leather and wool, under whom George was often employed to keep sheep. This suited the retired, contemplative turn of mind which he early displayed, and afforded leisure to prepare for the mission to which he at length conceived himself called. He is said to have worn a leathern dress, as at once plain, mortified, and durable for his travels. In the year one thousand six hundred and forty-seven he began to appear as a public teacher of religion, principally urging the necessity of receiving for our rule the inward teachings of the Holy Spirit.

The royal sceptre of Charles was now broken, and the hierarchy which leaned on it for support, was prostrate in the dust; while the presbyterians, who

^a Gough's History of the Quakers, vol. I. p. 60.

had the ascendant in the parliament and metropolis, could not succeed in bowing the nation to their yoke; because they were opposed by the army, which favoured the independents, who were the advocates of religious toleration. While the public balance thus vacillated between the contending parties, the places of worship belonging to each parish were frequently occupied by unauthorised teachers, and red coats, as well as black, were seen in the pulpit. The former constrained, hypocritical uniformity being exchanged for a chaotic diversity, good Christians were terrified and distracted by the deluge of new and strange opinions; not aware that the tumult would, ere long, subside, and all things naturally find their level. But when the various sects were, by their mutual collisions, heated into an excessive ardour for their distinguishing peculiarities, there were many who were dissatisfied with them all, and professed to be waiting and seeking for truth, which had not yet appeared. To these Fox addressed himself in a favourable moment¹.

Before he appears to have had any definite sentiments concerning discipline, which, sooner or later, in some form or other, all societies must adopt, he confined himself to the doctrine of divine influence on the mind, which all parties professed to maintain, and to which the puritans had, in a powerful degree, directed the public attention. At first, this apostle of quakerism delivered his sentiments in the parish churches; where he is charged with interrupting the preachers, and disturbing the congregations in their worship. This occasioned his first imprisonment at Nottingham, in the year one thousand six hundred and forty-nine.

¹ Gough, vol. I. p. 70.

Though Gough, in his history of the quakers, has severely censured Neale, the historian of the puritans, for giving an evil colouring to the conduct of Fox in this instance; he has himself, either with studied address, or by an unaccountable negligence, passed over the very circumstance which should throw light upon the whole affair. The question is, whether George Fox interrupted the minister, and disturbed the congregation, or not. The minister, on the Lord's-day, took for his text the words of the apostle Peter, "we have a more sure word of prophecy, to which ye do well to take heed, as to a light that shineth in a dark place." Fox, under what he conceived an impulse of duty, had gone to the place of worship, and now "feeling, as he apprehended (says Gough), a divine power opening his understanding into a clearer conception of the meaning of the text, and an authority to express his sense thereof, he signified that this sure word of prophecy was not the Scriptures but the Holy Spirit^k." But whether George Fox stayed till the public service was concluded, or even till the minister had closed his discourse; or whether he disturbed the worship, and interrupted the minister in the midst of his sermon, we are not informed.

Fox is also charged with disturbing the minister of Mansfield in the time of divine service. This again is not directly denied, but the thrust is parried by an indirect attack on the priest, as he is called, for the conduct of his hearers, in assaulting our friend with sticks, books, and benches. Such depraved actions sufficiently prove them to have known or felt but little of the genuine nature of religion,

^k Gough, vol. I. p. 82.

whatever they may have heard from the pulpit; and for this we abandon them to all the severity of castigation, which the admirers of Fox may be disposed to bestow. But when a numerous assembly is once disturbed by an unusual interference, considered by them as a gross insult, who can be answerable for the consequences? The doors of a place of worship being open to every one, no religious body is responsible for the behaviour of all within its walls; and it has often been found, that the greatest strangers, or even enemies, who happened to be present, have been eager to show their resentment of any disturbance, by officiously venting their anger on the authors, in a way for which the real members of the congregation would give them little thanks. The inferences which are drawn by the historian of the quakers, against the ministers and religion of the people, among whom their hero received such infamous treatment, are, therefore, invalid and illiberal. As to the plea, that it was at that time admitted, especially by some of the sects, for others beside the appointed preacher to address the congregation, it may be replied, that at no time, by no society of worshippers, has it been allowed for *any* one to speak in the congregation. This the quakers, who are supposed to admit as much of the liberty of prophesying as any communion, well know. Reasoning, therefore, upon the golden rule of doing to others as we would they should do to us; what would the friends think of a baptist, who should address one of their meetings on the necessity of baptism with water, as no more inconsistent with that of the Spirit, than vocal prayer is with mental?

The name of priest, which, on these, and indeed on

all occasions, is given to the minister disturbed, deserves also severe reprehension. To those ministers who are called priests by their own liturgy, and who approve of the term, it may perhaps be applied without impropriety ; though even these would, in general, dislike it as an ill-natured sneer. But where men neither employ the term, nor claim the privileges of the office, believing that every other priesthood ceased when Christ appeared to become our high priest, the practice of the quakers in calling them priests, is neither more nor less than the meanness of giving nick-names. It is the more censurable in the friends, because they know the term to be improper in every sense ; and they pique themselves upon calling things by their proper names.

At Derby, in the year one thousand six hundred and fifty, George Fox was again committed to gaol for speaking in the place of worship at the close of the service. It was on this occasion that the friends received the name of quakers. The magistrates, who, under colour of justice, violated at once all rules of justice, and all feelings of humanity, towards George Fox, were called independents : but at such unchristian conduct any sect would blush. Independents were now in the throne of power, which induced many to plume themselves with the name, who afterwards assisted to sacrifice them to the vengeance of the prelates. Had the nature of his principles permitted, and the plans of Providence concurred to elevate George Fox to the seat occupied by Oliver Cromwell, Britain would have swarmed with quakers, of whose spirit and behaviour the friends would now be heartily ashamed.

The principles and conduct of the followers of

George Fox, in many respects so novel, and abhorrent to all the ideas which then prevailed, often provoked the intolerance of the leading men of the day. In a letter to the protector, the quakers complain, that though there are no penal laws in force, obliging men to comply with the established religion, yet their friends are imprisoned for refusing to take an oath; for not paying their tythes; for disturbing the public assemblies and meeting in the streets; while some have been whipped for vagabonds, and for their plain speeches to the magistrates. Like most other sects, their infancy was stained with some errors; and their extravagancies, especially those of the female preachers, their distortions, symbolical actions, and prophetic denunciations, were supposed to justify the injuries heaped on them, by those who had not learned the truly Christian doctrine of toleration. To this day these blots on their history are studiously recollected by their enemies, with the addition of many circumstances, of which they never were guilty.

The friends soon tacitly admitted the impropriety of their conduct in disturbing the assemblies of other Christians, by the abandonment of the practice; and as their numbers increased, amidst the shameless persecution which they endured, they hired, in the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-four, a place for their own worship, called the Bull and Mouth, in St: Martins-le-grand, London. They were still, however, distinguished by the itinerant labours, both of men and women. Francis Howgill and Edward Borough, were the first who preached in London. John Camm and John Audland travelled to Bristol, where their preaching excited great attention. Their

public assemblies, for want of room in their meeting-houses, were held in the open fields, even in winter; where multitudes, to the amount of four thousand, sometimes attended. Many embraced their doctrine; so that Bristol has ever since been a principal seat of quakerism. This excited envy, and led to their expulsion from the city, by the magistrates, who appear to have given too much countenance to a persecution which would have been a disgrace to a horde of lawless savages.

As their numbers increased, the protector, whose eyes were every where, deeming it prudent to guard against any danger from this quarter, required George Fox to promise not to disturb his government. This engagement was to be given in writing, but expressed in whatever terms the writer chose to employ. George, therefore, wrote to the protector by the name of Oliver Cromwell, declaring, that "he did deny the wearing, or drawing of a sword, or any outward weapon, against him or any man¹." Cromwell afterwards admitted Fox to an interview, when the preacher delivered some wholesome truths, which were received in a manner highly to the protector's honour. He who held the sceptre of Britain, and the balance of Europe, with true magnanimity, allowed an obscure individual to remain covered in his presence^m.

Yet the sufferings which the quakers endured under the protectorate, expose the fallacy of the extravagant praises, which have been bestowed on this period, and prove, that whether the government were episcopalian, presbyterian, or independent, the mass

¹ Gough, vol. I. p. 156.

^m Clarkson's Portraiture of Quakerism.

of the people have ever been graceless heathens. George Whitehead preaching at Nayland, in Suffolk, was seized and whipped, till the sight of his body, covered with blood, roused even the populace to plead for mercy. James Parnel, a well-educated youth of sixteen, having joined the society, and commenced preacher, was confined in jail with so much cruelty, that his feeble constitution sunk in the arms of death. Even the females endured injuries, of which humanity cannot record the history without a sigh, nor decency read without a blush.

While George Fox himself drank to the dregs of the bitter cup which intolerance had mingled for his new society, he still laboured for its welfare, with the courage of a lion, and the patience of a martyr. He began to find that discipline, which had been the idol and the overthrow of the presbyterians, was essential to the well-being, and even to the existence of his system. Some attention began to be paid to this subject, in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty, and six years afterwards, the father of the society travelled extensively to perfect the machine, and set it in complete motion. On this delicate point differences arose, even among the friends; for two preachers of Westmoreland, offended with the new regulations, and particularly with the institution of the female meeting for discipline, separated from the main body, and held meetings with those who espoused their cause^a.

When death had levelled Oliver Cromwell with the dust, and the officers of the army had hurled Richard from his seat, general Monk, on his march into England, issued general orders to leave the quakers undisturbed

^a Gough, vol. III. p. 9.

in the exercise of their religion. At the restoration, the quakers participated in the general joy. They probably expected more liberty from the dissolute Charles, than they had enjoyed under the firm grasp of Cromwell; or thought that, at all events, their condition could not be worse. In this, however, they were mistaken. Hundreds were, indeed, liberated at first, but thousands were afterwards imprisoned. They had before been abused in defiance of authority; now to the license of the rabble was added the vengeance of the throne. Charles, in spite of the word of a king, which he had given at Breda, seized the first opportunity to persecute for religion. When Venner's insurrection furnished a pretext, the quakers were singled out as a mark for the deadly shafts of vengeance; for though they were well known to be innocent, they were also known to be defenceless*.

When the conventicle act was in force, "the behaviour of the quakers, says Burnet, had something in it that looked bold. They met at the same place and hour as before. None of them would go out of the way, but when they were seized they went all to prison together, where they staid without petitioning for release, and when discharged they refused to pay any fees. As soon as liberated, they returned to their meetings again, and when they found the place shut up by the magistrates, they assembled before the doors. Thus they carried their point, for the government grew weary of them, and were glad to let them alone."

Their meeting-house, at Horsely-down, near London, was by an order of council, in the year one thousand six hundred and seventy, pulled down; but

* Gough, vol. I. p. 442.

p Burnet's Own Times, p. 271.

they assembled on the ruins. They were insulted and knocked down. One of them, as he lay bleeding on the ground, was so wounded in the head, that the brain was visible. When the soldiers were asked how they could behave so cruelly, they replied, "if you knew our orders, you would say we were merciful¹."

As usual, in the midst of these sufferings, it was made apparent that persecution was as stupid in policy as it was infamous in morals; for in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty-six, the celebrated William Penn, son of the admiral, joined their society. By the death of his father, who at first turned his quaker son out of doors, but was afterwards reconciled to him, he came into possession of considerable property. The father had been privy to some of the disgraceful secrets of Charles and his brother James, to which it is added, that he advanced considerable sums to the extravagant king; so that he was in high favour at court, and his son also, though a quaker, was treated by both the brothers with great indulgence. Charles granted, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty one, to William Penn and his heirs, the province in America, which lies on the west side of the river Delaware². To this he acquired a more legitimate right by a fair purchase from the aboriginal Indians, and settled it by the name of Pennsylvania, of which Philadelphia was the capital. His treaty with the Indians, and the code of laws which he drew up for the new settlement, have received, as they deserve, from every quarter the highest eulogiums. It is, however, by a mistake that writers affirm this to have been the first instance of just dealing in taking possession of the

¹ Gough, vol. II. p. 344.

² Gough, vol. II. p. 515.

American soil. The independents had already taught William Penn to purchase of the first owners'.

Quakers had before this period been known in America. They are said to have "come and settled first among the antinomians in Rhode island. Here they were unhappily successful, not only in seducing the people to attend to the mystical dispensation of the light within, as having the whole of religion contained in it, but also to oppose the good order, both civil and sacred, erected in the colony". Mary Fisher and Ann Austin were the first: they came from Barbadoes to Boston, July, one thousand six hundred and fifty-six, and about a month after, were followed by eight more. They were imprisoned and then exiled from the colony. When the quakers were, by beat of drum, prohibited from entering the territory, an inhabitant of Boston, whose name was Nicholas Upsal, entered his protest, and warned the magistrates not to bring the guilt of persecution on the country. For this wise and salutary remonstrance, he was heavily fined.

The quakers returned and were shamefully treated. Three of them endured the indignity of having their ears cut off; but the infamy rested on those who inflicted, rather than on those who suffered the punishment. They were first ordered to be sold for slaves; and though this law was so bad that it was not executed, it was followed by another, which doomed them to death, if found within the colony after a certain time. In the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-eight, four persons suffered death by this statute of blood.

* Neal.

† Cotton Mather quoted by Neal, in History of New England, vol. I. p. 311.

It has been observed, that these were independents, who proved such deadly persecutors. Whatever they were, their conduct deserves to be held up to everlasting execration. But it should be remembered that there was no other religious profession, but the independents, in the colony; and let the promiscuous mass, which forms the population of any country be in a manner compelled to mingle with the purest communion under heaven, by having no other to which they can resort, and its genuine complexion will soon be changed^t. The independents in England wrote with the pen of Dr. Owen, a letter to dissuade those of New England from pursuing the bloody work. This epistle observes that the truth cannot be betrayed, or any way injured by allowing it liberty to speak for itself^u.

Quakers were now found almost in every quarter of the globe. Several travelled to Holland and Germany. "Mary Fisher, a religious maiden," says Gough,

^t Historic impartiality requires us to observe also, that the quakers are charged with such offences against civil society, as imperiously demanded the interference of the magistrate. Neale says, "that Deborah Wilson went through the streets of Salem stark naked, and that G. Bishop defends this, saying, 'she was a modest woman, but that bearing a great burden for the hardness and cruelty of the people, she went naked as a sign; when the wicked rulers laid hold on her, and sentenced her to be whipped.' Another female quaker went into the meeting-house at Newberry as naked as she was born. Thomas Newhouse went into the meeting-house at Boston with two glass bottles, which he broke against each other, saying, 'thus shall ye be broken.' But though these are only a few of the extravagancies which justified coercive measures, the magistrates should have known how to preserve the peace without the sacrifice of humanity." Neale's Hist. of New England, vol. I. p. 342.

^u Gough, vol. I. p. 122.

“ felt a religious concern upon her mind to pay a visit to Sultan Mahomet the fourth, then encamped with his army near Adrianople.” She arrived safely in the camp, and was treated with great deference by the prince, who appeared to approve of all she said. But two others went to convert the pope himself, beyond which there seemed but one step which they could go. The Turk, however, remained a mahometan ; nor did his holiness turn protestant. The relation of events, if not the order of history, introduces here another tale of madness. James Nailor, a preacher in the society, fell into extravagancies, and on a public entrance into Bristol, suffered himself to be addressed by divine names and honours. The committee of parliament, instead of sending him to bedlam, took vast trouble to torture him. The friends in general condemned his conduct, of which he himself afterwards repented, and was restored to the bosom of the society.

On the death of Charles the second, the quakers are said to have joined in congratulating James, his successor. Hume has given their address as follows : “ We are come to testify our sorrow for the death of our good friend Charles, and our joy for thy being made our governor. We are told that thou art not of the persuasion of the church of England no more than we, therefore we hope that thou wilt grant us the same liberty thou allowest thyself. Which doing we wish thee all manner of happiness.” But Gough denies that they sent on this occasion any congratulatory address, and justly asks, how they could, with any truth, call Charles their good friend, who left,

* Gough, vol. I. p. 160.

at his death, near one thousand five hundred quakers in prison.

In the benefits of James's indulgence the quakers participated equally with other dissenters. They wisely availed themselves of the liberty, which was their undoubted birthright; without enquiring by what authority, or with what motives it had been bestowed. In their thanks to the king for his indulgence, they say, "we rejoice to see the day that a king of England, from his royal seat, should assert this glorious principle, that conscience ought not to be restrained, nor people forced for matters of mere religion."

William Penn was now so great a favourite at court, that bishop Burnet speaks of him rather angrily, for being so busy to do that popish prince service. It was indeed a curious phænomenon to see these extremes meet; to behold a quaker the active courtier of a prince, who, to please his priests, attempted to deliver up his dominions to the pope, and thus bartered three crowns for a crucifix. Penn, who had been before, by some of his own society, suspected of leaning towards Rome, was reviled by his enemies as a jesuit in disguise.

But when the bishops were committed to the Tower by James, and were informed, that the quakers charged them with the death of some of their society, Robert Barclay paid them a kind visit; assuring them, that though they had too much reason, it was not their wish to remember injuries against them in the day of their adversity. Who can contemplate this unexpected scene, one of the

persecuted sect of quakers paying a charitable visit to the lordly prelates of the persecuting hierarchy, now immured in a gloomy prison, without calling to remembrance the captive prince who, while dragging the chariot of his haughty conqueror, consoled himself by watching the revolution of the wheels, which reminded him that he who was exalted to the skies to-day, might to-morrow change places with him who is trodden in the dust ?

CHAP. II.

STATE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DURING THIS
PERIOD.

SECTION I.

STATE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DURING THE REIGN OF KING
WILLIAM.

IN the praises of liberty, only Eloquence herself is qualified to write. Among sublunary blessings is there one which can bear a comparison, or which has a more benign and powerful influence on the formation of the human character? What an important figure the little barren spot of Greece makes in the history of the ancient world! How much superior in words and deeds were its people to the millions inhabiting the extensive regions of Asia! But to what can it be attributed? When the Greeks ceased to be free, they sank into an abject state like the Asiatics, and produced none of those great men who had been so numerous in former times, hence it is clearly seen that *political liberty* was the cause. Among the nations of modern Europe, in the scale of character for talents, for energy, and for social comfort, it will be found that they may be properly placed according to the measure of it which each enjoys, or has enjoyed for a century past; for time is required to produce its delicious and salutary fruits. Britain owes her pre-eminence in the

most solid advantages, to the possession of political and civil liberty since the glorious revolution.

If there be an individual in the whole family of man who is warranted to be strongly attached to the cause of liberty, it is the disciple of Jesus Christ; and the more ardent his zeal for the propagation of the Gospel in the world, the stronger may be his attachment. Nor will it be viewed as either extravagant or misplaced, when it is considered, that with political, religious liberty is inseparably connected. Whenever political liberty is, unhappily for its inhabitants, banished from a country, religious liberty is virtually included in the proscription. Should it in any instance, for reasons of state, be permitted to remain, the security is so precarious, and it is found so uncongenial to the sentiments and views of those who banished political liberty, that, after a trial of the incompatibility of it with their wishes and designs, it also receives orders to depart. Of the truth of this, the records of the nations contain abundant evidence.

At the time when Christianity was first introduced into the world, the defect of religious liberty was, in some measure, compensated by the nature of the ancient governments. Whatever might be their distinguishing forms, there was a looseness in all of them, which left to the people a considerable measure of freedom from constraint: and their compulsory methods of exercising authority, which were all of a military kind, instead of organizing the people, overawed them, and coerced them into quietness and subordination. Amidst such a state of things Christianity arose in the world; and by favour of such lax institutions, was permitted to spring up, to cast

its roots deep, and spread its branches far and wide, while the rulers and the great were almost unapprized of its existence.

In the middle ages, the same service was rendered to religion by the feudal system. The barons were complete masters in their own domains, and could, except in very extraordinary circumstances, preserve from harm those who sought a sanctuary under the wing of their friendship and power. Thus Wickliffe was protected by John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, at a time when the clergy sought his ruin, and the king would have permitted them to wreak their vengeance on the illustrious reformer. In the territories of the count of Tholouse, the Waldenses and Albigenes, for a considerable time, found a place of safety; while Rome and her ecclesiastical myrmidons, roared with ceaseless rage. A multitude of similar instances occurred, during the space of several centuries, which were equally favourable to the cause of true religion.

But in modern Europe, where political institutions are in one respect more perfect, where every thing which takes place is accurately known, and magistrates have information concerning each individual within their jurisdiction, unless religious liberty be enjoyed, pure Christianity will be unable to find an entrance. If by any means it has gained admittance, it holds but a precarious existence, and if an attempt be made to propagate the truth, (a privilege without which religious liberty is but an empty name) it is the certain signal for its departure. The history of Europe, from the reformation to the close of the seventeenth century, furnishes a luminous commentary on the present subject. During this period, the

state of the people on the continent became gradually more unfavourable with respect to political liberty ; and in consequence of this, the progress of the Gospel and its propagation in the world were essentially impeded. With the exception of one country in Europe, a generous allowance of forms of religion, differing from those established, was almost unknown : and in that country, the dissenting sects were more indebted to a connivance at their worship, than to statute law confirming their rights. Such was the state of things in the Dutch republic..

At this time religious liberty entered our beloved country, under the protection of the prince of Orange, and in spite of one or two stern warnings in the following reign to be gone, has continued with us ever since.

The tyranny of James the second having alarmed the friends of freedom, and his inordinate haste to introduce popery, alienated the hearts of all good protestants, a general dissatisfaction took place. The chief men of the country turned their eyes to William prince of Orange, who, by his mother, the daughter of Charles the first, was nephew, and by his wife, was son-in-law to the king. Urged by a variety of considerations, he complied with their wishes. A peculiar providence directed his way in the ocean, and guarded him from the attacks of a superior fleet, which was waiting to intercept his course. He landed at Torbay, on the fourth day of November, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-eight. The people, nay James's friends, and troops forsook him ; and being seized with fear, he descended from his throne, and sought a sanctuary in France. The convention

which was assembled, placed the crown on the head of William and of Mary; and being exalted into a parliament, their attention was immediately directed to the numerous and important matters which required to be speedily settled, in consequence of the change which had taken place. To delineate the *revolution settlement* belongs to the department of civil history: the promise of the writers of this work, is to take cognizance of what relates to the cause of religion.

When William was meditating his arduous expedition, in order to give satisfaction to the minds of his friends in Britain, he sent over a confidential declaration, which was likewise published, "promising to endeavour a good agreement, between the church of England, and all protestant dissenters; and to cover and secure all those who would live peaceably under the government, from all persecution on account of their religion^a." Some of the most considerable and moderate among the clergy, anxious that the dissenters should form one body with them in opposition to the enemies of the protestant faith, had the frankness to acknowledge that the church had treated them with severity, and promised, that if by their united means they were delivered from their present alarming condition, the dissenters should find them disposed to do every thing in their power to bring about a *re-union* on terms of conformity to which they could easily submit. Forgetting past injuries (and to forget injuries so numerous and aggravated was no ordinary piece of heroism), the dissenters cordially co-operated with their fellow-protestants in opposition to popery; and throwing the whole weight of their influence

^a Dr. Calamy's Abridgment of Baxter's Life, &c, vol. I. p. 422.

into the scale, gave a powerful ascendancy to the prince of Orange.

The revolution being happily accomplished, they naturally looked for the fulfilment of the fair promises which had been so lately made. Whatever William had promised on this head, he was desirous to perform. Trained up during his early years in a private station, and mixing with mankind on the footing of equality, he knew more of human nature than usually falls to the lot of those who are born in a palace, and educated for a throne. It was also an advantage to him, that from his childhood he had seen different religious sects living together in harmony, and performing the various duties which they owed to each other in Society, with as much good will as if all had thought alike. Persons living in a country where they have seen none but those of their own creed, are apt to think of other denominations with a kind of horror, and imagine them to be little better than demons in human form.

When our country threw off the yoke of Rome, the Spanish priests persuaded the people, that the English, in consequence of becoming heretics, were stripped of their former shape, and had horns like the devil, and satan's cloven foot. It was therefore not without astonishment, that the first time an embassy was sent from England to Spain, the persons who composed it were seen to have undergone no change of form, in consequence of the change of their faith; but were as handsome and well shaped as if they had still continued within the pale of the Romish church. Such horrors as the Spaniards felt at the imagined alteration in the English, do many persons of good natural abilities, and dispositions, and even of culti-

vated minds feel in respect to those who hold a creed differing from their own: when this happens to be the case with princes, and men of influence in society, the effects are exceedingly to be deplored. From such bigotry William was entirely free: he had a liberality of mind in respect to different religious denominations enjoying the rights of conscience and of worship, which, with the exception of Cromwell, none of the rulers of England had ever possessed. Sensible therefore of the importance of uniting all English protestants, he was no sooner fixed on the throne, than he endeavoured to carry into execution the plans which he had formed for the accomplishment of so desirable an end.

In consequence of the changes produced by the revolution, a considerable number of offices, both civil and military, being left vacant, required proper persons to fill them. It was William's wish to be able to call into public service the talents of any of his protestant subjects without exception: and he thus expressed his sentiments to both houses of parliament: "As I doubt not but you will sufficiently provide against papists, so I hope you will leave room for the admission of all protestants who are willing and able to serve. This conjunction will tend to the better uniting you among yourselves, and the strengthening you against your common adversaries." The intimation of the king's desire, gave rise to a motion, in the house of lords, for introducing a clause in the bill, by which it was proposed to take away the necessity of receiving the sacrament, in order to make a man capable of enjoying any public office,

^b Bishop Burnet says, that the king put this into his speech without the knowledge of his ministers, vol. II. p. 8. Calamy, p. 439.

employment, or place of trust. This was when the house was deliberating on measures for abrogating of oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and appointing other oaths. But here the king was advanced more than a century before the greater part of his subjects; for when the clause was reported to the house, it was rejected by a large majority. Seven peers however entered their protest^c."

Unable to attain an object so very desirable, his majesty's ministers resolved to make a second trial; and perceiving they could not prevail to set aside a sacramental test, they introduced another clause, by which it was provided that a person should be sufficiently qualified for any office, employment, or place of trust, who a year before, or after his admission or entrance thereunto, did receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper, either according to the usage of the church of England, or in any other protestant congregation; and could produce a certificate, under the hands of the minister, and two other credible persons, members of such a protestant congregation^d. But this clause had the

^c The lords Delamere, Stamford, North, and Grey, Chesterfield, Wharton, Lovelace, and Vaughan. The substance of the reasons of their dissent was that an hearty union among protestants, was a greater security to the church or state than any test which could be invented: that this obligation to receive the sacrament, was a test on the protestants, rather than on the papists: that as long as it was continued, there could not be that hearty and thorough union among protestants, as had always been wished, and was at this time indispensibly necessary: and lastly, that a greater caution ought not to be received from such as were admitted into offices, than from the members of the two houses of parliament who are not obliged to receive the sacrament to enable them to sit in either house. Calamy, p. 439, 40. Tindal's Continuation of Rapin, vol. XVI. p. 175.

^d Calamy, p. 440. Tindal, vol. XVI. p. 175.

same fate as the former, being rejected by a great majority of the house. Six peers, however, were so strenuous for it, that they recorded their dissent. Foiled in both these attempts, the king was obliged to remain deprived of the services of such of his subjects as dissented from the church of England, and could not, with a good conscience, communicate in the Lord's supper according to her rites. His zeal in their cause gave extreme offence to the high church bigots, and created a bitter enmity against him, which ceased not with his life.

Besides these rejected measures, the king had two other objects in view respecting the dissenters, in both which he was exceedingly desirous of success. The one was a *comprehension*, which would, by the removal of those exceptionable parts of the rubric, to which they generally objected, bring the greater part of the presbyterians into the church: the other was a *toleration*, for the benefit of such as could not even then conscientiously enter the establishment. The former failed, the latter was crowned with success.

From what unexpected quarters benefits, great and lasting, sometimes arise: and the ancient proverb may be still not improperly used, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" When the bishops, who scrupled to take the oaths required by the new government, were in the house, some of them, for the last time; just before they left it, they closed their parliamentary career with a motion for a bill for granting toleration to protestant dissenters; and another for a comprehension. The proposal for a toleration was immediately taken up; and on the twenty-eighth of February, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-nine, the earl of Nottingham presented the bill to the

house of lords. It was, he said, for substance the same with one which he had formerly drawn up and laid before parliament, in the reign of Charles the second, when the nation was so violently agitated about the *bill of exclusion*, by which a papist was to be declared incapable of sitting on the English throne. The bill appeared so reasonable, and so necessary for the public welfare, that it does not seem to have met with any serious opposition in passing through its different stages, in either house; and it received the royal assent on the twenty-fourth of May, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-nine. Some indeed proposed to give it a limited duration, that the dissenters might be kept upon their good behaviour; and at the close of the period might have it continued, abridged, or annulled, according to their deserts. But more generous sentiments prevailed. The good disposition of the nation at the time, for granting what all allowed to be conducive to the public tranquillity, was urged as a reason for granting it without a clause which must hurt the feelings of those whom it was designed to please.

A copy of this act, which may be considered as the *Magna Charta* of the dissenters, will be deemed a valuable document, and its insertion necessary in a history of this kind.

The *Toleration Act*, entitled, 'An act for exempting their majesties' protestant subjects dissenting from the church of *England* from the penalties of certain laws.

Forasmuch as some ease to scrupulous consciences, in the exercise of religion, may be an effectual means to unite their majesties' protestant subjects in interest and affection.

“ I. Be it enacted by the king and queen’s most excellent majesties, and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that neither the statute made in the twenty-third year of the reign of the late queen Elizabeth, entituled, ‘ *An act to retain the queen’s majesty’s subjects in their due obedience;* ’ nor that statute made in the twenty-ninth year of the said queen, entituled, ‘ *An act for the more speedy and due execution of certain branches of the statute made in the twenty-third year of the queen’s majesty’s reign,* ’ viz. the aforesaid act ; nor that branch or clause of a statute, made in the first year of the reign of the said queen, entituled, ‘ *An act for the uniformity of common-prayer and service in the church, and administration of the sacraments,* ’ whereby all persons having no lawful or reasonable excuse to be absent, are required to resort to their parish church or chapel, or some usual place where the common prayer shall be used, upon pain of punishment by the censures of the church ; and also upon pain, that every person so offending shall forfeit for every such offence twelve pence. Nor that statute made in the third year of the late king James the first, entituled, ‘ *An act for the better discovering and repressing popish recusants.* ’ Nor that after-statute, made in the same year, entituled, ‘ *An act to prevent and avoid dangers which may grow by popish recusants.* ’ Nor any other law or statute of this realm made against papists, or popish recusants, except the statutes made in the twenty-fifth year of king Charles the second, entituled, ‘ *An act for preventing dangers which may happen from popish recusants.* ’ And except also the statute made in the

thirtieth year of the said king Charles the second, entituled, '*An act for the more effectual preserving the king's person and government, by disabling papists from sitting in either house of parliament,*' shall be construed to extend to any person or persons dissenting from the church of *England*, that shall take the oaths mentioned in a statute made this present parliament, entituled, '*An act for removing and preventing all questions and disputes concerning the assembling and sitting of the present parliament,*' shall make and subscribe the declaration mentioned in a statute made in the thirtieth year of the reign of king Charles the second, entituled, '*An act to prevent papists from sitting in either house of parliament.*' Which oaths and declarations the justices of the peace at the general sessions of the peace, to be held for the county or place where such person shall live, are hereby required to tender and administer to such persons as shall offer themselves to take, make, and subscribe the same, and thereof to keep a register. And likewise none of the persons aforesaid shall give or pay, as any fee or reward, to any officer or officers belonging to the court aforesaid, above the sum of sixpence, nor that more than once for his or their entry of his taking the said oaths, and making and subscribing the said declaration; nor above the further sum of sixpence for any certificate of the same to be made out and signed by the officer or officers of the said court.

" II. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that all and every person and persons already convicted or prosecuted, in order to conviction of recusancy, by indictment, information, action of debt, or otherwise grounded upon the aforesaid statute, or any of them that shall take the said

oaths mentioned in the said statute made this present parliament; and make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid in the court of Exchequer, or assize, or general or quarter sessions, to be held for the county where such person lives, and to be thence respectively certified into the Exchequer, shall be thenceforth exempted and discharged from all the penalties, seizures, forfeitures, judgments, and executions incurred by force of any of the aforesaid statutes without any composition, fee, or further charge whatsoever.

“ III. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that all and every person and persons that shall, as aforesaid, take the said oaths, and make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid, shall not be liable to any pains, penalties, or forfeitures, mentioned in an act made in thirty-fifth year of the reign of the late queen Elizabeth, entituled, ‘ *An act to retain the queen’s majesty’s subjects in their due obedience.*’ Nor in an act made in the twenty-second year of the reign of the late king Charles the second, entituled, ‘ *An act to prevent and suppress seditious conventicles.*’ Nor shall any of the said persons be prosecuted in any ecclesiastical court, for or by reason of their non-conforming to the church of England.

“ IV. Provided always, and be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any assembly of persons dissenting from the church of England shall be held in any place for religious worship, with the doors locked, barred, or bolted, during any time of such meeting together; all and every person or persons that shall come to, and be at such meeting, shall not receive any benefit from this law, but be liable to all the pains and penalties of all the aforesaid laws

recited in this act for such their meeting, notwithstanding his taking the oaths, and his making and subscribing the declaration aforesaid.

“ V. Provided always, that nothing herein contained shall be construed to exempt any of the persons aforesaid from paying of tythes, or other parochial duties, or any other duties to the church or minister; nor from any prosecution in any ecclesiastical court or elsewhere for the same.

“ VI. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any person dissenting from the church of England as aforesaid, shall hereafter be chosen, or otherwise appointed, to bear the office of high constable, or petit constable, churchwarden, overseer of the poor, or any other parochial or ward office, and such person shall scruple to take upon him any of the said offices, in regard of the oaths, or any other matter or thing required by the law to be taken or done, in respect of such office, every such person shall and may execute such office or employment by a sufficient deputy, by him to be provided, that shall comply with the laws on this his behalf: provided always, the said deputy be allowed and approved by such person and persons in such manner as such officer or officers respectively should by law have been allowed and approved.

“ VII. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that no person dissenting from the church of England in holy orders, or pretended holy orders, or pretending to holy orders; nor any preacher or teacher of any congregation of dissenting protestants, that shall make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid, and take the said oaths at the general or quarter sessions of the peace, to be held for the county,

town, parts or division, where such person lives; which court is hereby empowered to administer the same, and shall also declare his approbation of, and subscribe the articles of religion mentioned in the statute made in the thirteenth year of the reign of the late queen Elizabeth; except the thirty-fourth, thirty-fifth, and thirty-sixth, and those words of the twentieth article, viz. '*The church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith, and yet*' shall be liable to any of the pains or penalties mentioned in an act made in the seventeenth year of the reign of king Charles the second, entituled, '*An act for restraining non-conformists from inhabiting in corporations*'; nor the penalties mentioned in the aforesaid act, made in the twenty-second year of his said late majesty's reign, for or by reason of such persons preaching at any meeting for the exercise of religion. Nor to the penalties of one thousand pounds, mentioned in an act made in the thirteenth and fourteenth of king Charles the second, entituled, '*An act for the uniformity of public prayers, and administring of sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies; and for establishing the form of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests, and deacons, in the church of England*, for officiating in any congregation for the exercise of religion, permitted and allowed by this act.

“ VIII. Provided always, that the making and subscribing the said declaration, and the taking the said oaths, and making the declaration of approbation and subscription to the said articles, in manner as aforesaid, by every respective person, or persons, herein before mentioned, at such general or quarter sessions of the peace as aforesaid, shall be then and

there entered of record, in the said court, for which sixpence shall be paid to the clerk of the peace, and no more; provided that such person shall not at any time preach in any place but with the doors not locked, barred, or bolted as aforesaid.

“ IX. And whereas some dissenting protestants scruple the baptizing of infants, be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that every person in pretended holy orders, or pretending to holy orders, or preacher, or teacher, that shall subscribe the aforesaid articles of religion, except before excepted; and also except part of the twenty-seventh article teaching infant baptism, and shall take the oaths, and make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid, in manner aforesaid, every such person shall enjoy all the privileges, benefits, and advantages, which any other dissenting minister as aforesaid might have, or enjoy by virtue of this act.

“ X. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that every teacher, or preacher, in holy orders, or pretended holy orders, that is a minister, preacher, or teacher of a congregation, that shall take the oaths herein required, and make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid; and also subscribe such of the aforesaid articles of the church of England, as are required by this act, in manner aforesaid, shall be thenceforth exempted from serving upon any jury, or from being chosen, or appointed to bear the office of church-warden, overseer of the poor, or any other parochial or ward office, or other office, in any hundred of any shire, city, town, parish, division, or wapentake.

“ XI. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that any justice of the peace may at any

time hereafter require any person that goes to any meeting for exercise of religion, to make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid, and also to take the said oaths or declaration of fidelity herein aftermentioned, in case such person scruple the taking of an oath, and upon refusal thereof, such justice of peace is hereby required to commit such person to prison without bail or main-prize, and to certify the name of such person to the next general or quarter sessions of the peace, to be held for that county, city, town, part, or division, where such person then resides ; and if such person so committed, shall, upon a second tender at the general or quarter sessions, refuse to make and subscribe the declaration aforesaid, such person refusing shall be then and there recorded, and shall be taken thenceforth to all intents and purposes for a popish recusant convict, and suffer accordingly, and incur all the penalties and forfeitures of the aforesaid laws.

“ XII. And whereas there are certain other persons dissenters from the church of England, who scruple the taking of any oath, be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that every such person shall make and subscribe the aforesaid declaration, and also this declaration of fidelity following.

‘ I, A. B. do sincerely promise, and solemnly declare before God and the world, that I will be true and faithful to king WILLIAM and queen MARY. And I do solemnly profess and declare, that I do from my heart abhor, detest, and renounce, as impious and heretical, that damnable doctrine and position, That princes excommunicated, or deprived by the pope, or any authority of the see of Rome, may be deposed or murdered by their subjects, or any other whatsoever. And I do

declare, that no foreign prince, person, prelate, state, or potentate, hath, or ought to have, any power, jurisdiction, superiority, pre-eminence, or authority, ecclesiastical or spiritual within this realm.'

" And shall subscribe a profession of their Christian belief in these words :

' I, A. B. profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ his eternal Son, the true God; and in the Holy Spirit, one God blessed for evermore; and do acknowledge the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration.'

" Which declaration and subscription shall be made and entered of record at the general quarter sessions of the peace for the county, city, or place, where every such person shall then reside. And every such person that shall make and subscribe the two declarations and profession aforesaid, being thereunto required, shall be exempted from all the pains and penalties of all and every the aforementioned statutes made against popish recusants, or protestant non-conformists; and also from the penalties of an act made in the fifth year of the reign of the late queen Elizabeth, entituled, '*an act for the assurance of the queen's royal power over all estates and subjects within her dominions*,' for or by reason of such persons not taking or refusing to take the oath mentioned in the said act. And also from the penalties of an act made in the thirteenth and fourteenth years of the reign of king Charles the second, entituled, '*an act for preventing mischiefs arising by certain persons called quakers refusing to take lawful oaths*,' and enjoy all other the benefits, privileges and advantages, under the like limitations, provisos, and conditions, which any other dissenters should or ought to enjoy by virtue of this act.

“XIII. Provided always, and be it enacted, by the authority aforesaid, that in case any person shall refuse to take the said oaths when tendered to them, which every justice of the peace is hereby empowered to do, such persons shall not be (admitted) permitted to make and subscribe the two declarations aforesaid, though required thereunto either before any justice of the peace, or at the general or quarter sessions, before or after any popish recusancy, as aforesaid, unless such person can, within thirty-one days after such tender of the declaration to him, produce two sufficient protestant witnesses to testify upon oath, that they believe him to be a protestant dissenter, or a certificate under the hands of four protestants who are conformable to the church of England, or have taken the oaths, and subscribed the declaration above-named, and shall produce a certificate under the hands and seals of six or more sufficient men of the congregation to which he belongs, owning him for one of them.

“XIV. Provided also, and be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that until such certificate, under the hands of six of his congregation as aforesaid, be produced, and two protestant witnesses come to attest his being a protestant dissenter, or a certificate under the hands of four protestants, as aforesaid, be produced, the justice of the peace shall, and hereby is required to take a recognizance with two sureties, in the penal sum of fifty pounds, to be levied of his goods and chattels, lands, and tenements, to the use of the king's and queen's majesties, their heirs and successors, for his producing the same; and if he cannot give such security, to commit him to prison, there to remain until he has produced such certificate, or two witnesses as aforesaid.

“ XV. Provided always, and it is the true intent and meaning of this act, that all the laws made and provided for the frequenting of divine service on the Lord's-day, commonly called Sunday, shall be still in force, and exerted against all persons that offend against the said laws, except such persons come to some congregation, or assembly of religious worship, allowed or permitted by this act.

“ XVI. Provided always, and be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that neither this act, nor any clause, article, or thing, herein contained, shall extend, or be construed to extend, to give any ease benefit, or advantage, to any papist or popish recusant whatsoever, or any person, that shall deny in his preaching, or writing, the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, as it is declared in the aforesaid articles of religion.

“ XVII. Provided always, and be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any person or persons, at any time, or times, after the tenth day of June, do and shall, willingly, and of purpose, maliciously, or contemptuously, come into any cathedral, or parish church, chapel, or other congregation permitted by this act, and disquiet or disturb the same ; or misuse any preacher or teacher, such person or persons, upon proof thereof, before any justice of peace, by two or more sufficient witnesses, shall find two sureties, to be bound by recognizance in the penal sum of fifty pounds, and in default of such sureties shall be committed to prison, there to remain till the next general or quarter sessions. And upon conviction of the said offence, at the said general or quarter sessions, shall suffer the pain and penalty of twenty pounds,

to the use of the king's and queen's majesties, their heirs and successors.

“ XVIII. Provided always, that no congregation, or assembly for religious worship, shall be permitted or allowed by this act, until the place of such meeting shall be certified to the bishop of the diocese, or to the archdeacon of that archdeaconry, or to the justices of the peace, at the general or quarter sessions of the peace for the county, city, or place in which such meeting shall be held, and registered in the said bishop's or archdeacon's court respectively, or recorded at the said general or quarter sessions. The register, or clerk of the peace whereof respectively is hereby required to register the same, and to give certificate thereof to such person as shall demand the same, for which there shall be no greater fee nor reward taken than the sum of sixpence.”

That the act savoured of the spirit of the times will be easily perceived. Socinians and Arians are excluded from its protection. In order to enjoy the benefits which it confers, dissenting ministers must sign thirty-five articles and a half of the church of England. From the others, relating to episcopal government and ceremonies, they were exempted. As the ministers were, at that time, nearly all of a mind in matters of religion, and as the signing of human creeds, provided they believed them to be agreeable to the word of God, was not accounted a hardship, no complaints were made, nor any burden felt. On the contrary, they received the boon with joy; and the ministers of the different denominations in London put themselves under the protection of the law, by signing the doctrinal articles of

the church. Mr. Baxter, at the time, delivered in a paper, containing an explanation of various passages in them, which appeared to him of doubtful import : in this many of his brethren concurred with him*.

The word *toleration*, when used in matters of religion, has but an ungracious sound. The subject presents itself in two points of view. "Man renders homage to God:—and God receives homage from man." When we say man renders homage to God ; that another man, or a body of men, should tolerate me to perform my duty to my Creator seems strange, though from custom we can bear to hear it. But when we view the subject in the other light, that God receives homage from man, then for the legislature of a country, or for any human being, to permit or tolerate God to receive homage from me according to my conscience, is an expression which shocks the feelings, and the impropriety is too glaring to be borne.

But it is necessary to remove from the beginning of the nineteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, in order to judge aright of this act of parliament, which has been an invaluable blessing to the protestant-dissenters, and which has diffused its benign influence, from the day in which it passed to the present hour. England had embraced the reformation from popery almost a hundred and fifty years before the revolution : but during all that time a toleration by statute of such as held different sentiments in religion from the established church was unknown. The stern rigour of Elizabeth, the unfeeling ill-nature of James her successor, and the cold-blooded cruelty of the first Charles, never

* See Calamy, p. 469, 476.

admitted the thoughts of such a gracious measure. From the ascendancy of the long parliament till the restoration, though none were molested for their religious sentiments, but such as were considered to be hostile to the government, (which as new and feeble, was in dread of plots and conspiracies,) yet there was no legal security for their protection. After the restoration, the unprincipled libertinism of the second Charles left him at his ease to break through the solemn promises which he had made in the days of his exile, and to be a persecutor of the non-conformists during the greater part of his reign. His brother James, while he granted indulgence to these protestants who separated from the establishment, is too justly supposed to have had no other object in view but the gratification of the catholics, and the humiliation of the church : so that when he had thus gradually exalted those of his own faith, and their numbers were sufficiently increased, he would, by their means, have crushed both the protestant-dissenters and the church.

Here is the first legal toleration that England ever knew. In France, near a century before, the reformed (a name given to the protestants in that country) obtained, by the edict of Nantes, the enjoyment of many valuable privileges, and exchanged a long period of cruel persecution for a season of tranquillity and peace. But that instrument bore strong marks of the rudeness of the age. In some things it gave too much, in others not enough. Towns, cities, fortresses were put into their hands, to be kept as garrisons for their safeguard. On the other hand, from many towns and districts they were expressly excluded ; and they were not allowed to form new

congregations at their pleasure. The possession of fortified places was such a gross absurdity, and so strangely established *imperium in imperio*, that it could never be expected to remain inviolate for any length of time. After a long and painful series of infractions, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-five, Louis the fourteenth, the grandson of the magnanimous Henry the fourth, under whose patronage the edict of Nantes was framed, repealed it, and the whole of the system was destroyed. But instead of an act of toleration, suggested and framed by legislative wisdom, the edict of Nantes may be more justly considered as a compromise between two distinct portions of the people of France, which the reformed, having arms in their hands that they had long wielded in their defence, and often with success, conceived themselves entitled to demand.

In some of the German states Roman catholics and protestants, and in others Lutherans and Calvinists, enjoyed together liberty of worship; but it may be regarded rather as the establishment of different religious systems than a toleration given to a body of people who dissented from the established religion. Holland presented a more pleasing appearance during the greater part of the seventeenth century, in respect to religious liberty, than any other country in Europe. Besides the established church, which had adopted the forms of Geneva, protestants of other denominations were allowed peaceably to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience, without molestation, and without fear. When any persons in that country wished for a religious assembly of their own, they gave notice of their desire to the magistrate; and if he found no-

thing in their system, or their creed, which he conceived to be contrary to the safety and welfare of the community, they were protected in the exercise of their religion.

The act of toleration was far superior to all these. With the greatest propriety it gave to the dissenters, as a body, not an inch of civil power: it left unshackled the spirit of propagation: it reserved nothing to the discretionary power of the magistrate; but fixed every thing by express statute; and left the law of the land to prevent or punish abuse. So that, take it on the whole, it is to be regarded as a privilege of the first order, and an inestimable blessing.

But was it so great a matter, it may be said, for an English legislature to act according to an avowed principle of the religion which they professed: for religious liberty, which is one of the unalienable rights of human nature, springs out of the very essence of Christianity; and to persecute for conscience sake has ever been regarded as one of the discriminating marks of the antichristian beast^f. But plain as the subject now appears, let it not be forgotten that it required a long series of ages to make it so to the dominant party in church or state. The primitive Christians, who lived under pagan tyranny, and felt with bitterness "the iron entering into their soul," may well be supposed to have imbibed from the sacred Scriptures, as they actually did, the pure doctrine of liberty of conscience. They lay under no temptation from either ease or interest to open

^f I have long looked on liberty of conscience as one of the rights of human nature antecedent to society, which no man could give up, because it was not in his own power. Burnet's History of his Own Times, vol. II. folio, p. 216.

the breast to error : and accordingly, whenever they speak on this subject, their words are words of peace and truth. But no sooner was the sword of power wrested out of the hands of their adversaries, than those who professed Christianity began to use it in a most unjustifiable way, and too plainly showed that the doctrine of religious liberty was one which they but very imperfectly understood. The spirit of intolerance gradually increased till the established form of religion became impatient of contradiction, and would not bear a rival, nor even allow a harmless dissident to live in peace^z. In this mournful state of intolerance things continued near a thousand years. Even after the reformation from popery, whatever alteration for the better there might be in other points, there was but little here, and so thoroughly contaminated was the blood which flowed in the veins of the reformers, with the poison of an unchristian intolerance, that none of them, or even of their successors, could learn the doctrine of Christian liberty, or feel the obligations of the Gospel to cease from persecuting those who could not assent to the established creed. Holland had certainly the advantage here, and displayed unspeakably more of a tolerant disposition than any other country in Europe. But at last in England, one thousand six hundred and eighty-nine years after the birth of Christ, it is recognised as a principle by the legislative body of the nation, that Christians living peaceably under the government of their country, and holding no principle contrary to its welfare, ought to

^z Jortin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, 3 vols. 8vo. illustrate the subject with peculiar force, and may be read in that view with considerable improvement.

be allowed to worship God in a manner agreeable to the dictates of their conscience.

What a deadly blow does this representation give to the system of those who are always looking back with wonder and veneration to the wisdom and goodness of their ancestors; and who conceive, that the farther they look back the wiser and better their ancestors were. Surely the church is but in leading-strings, and has scarcely escaped from infancy to childhood, when its members have not learnt that their neighbour has as good a right to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience as they have themselves; and that it is the most inhuman cruelty to hinder him from rendering his homage publicly to God, merely because he thinks proper to do it in a way different from them.

It may excite surprise, that the general principle of the rights of conscience should be so late a subject of investigation. To search after it for a thousand years before the reformation would be vain. That distinguished age, though so fruitful of good to all succeeding ones, and though so powerful in its reasonings against the pretensions of Rome to lord it over the consciences of men, presents us with no specimens of note in favour of the general principle, that conscience is accountable to God alone. In the following generation we may turn over the writings of Lutheran and Calvinist, of episcopalian and presbyterian divines for this doctrine in vain. Among the independents, in the earlier part of the seventeenth century, it is more than probable the doctrine of religious liberty, and of the rights of conscience will first be found. But as is usually the case in first discoveries, we may expect that it will be found blended

with prejudices and mistakes. In the time of the long parliament, Dr. Owen wrote an essay on toleration, which embraces the grand principles with as much precision as could be looked for from an orthodox divine of that contending age^b: and his work may be considered as a successful step towards a full view of the truth. About the same time the doctrine was agitated by several very able laymen, and stated in still greater fulness, as well as confirmed by reasoning of a still more general and philosophical nature. Among these Milton is entitled to the most honourable mention, as the enlightened assertor of every man's right to worship God according to his conscience, whatever his sentiments may be^c. When a nation is agitated with internal commotions; especially if liberty be the object in dispute, the minds of men are roused to extraordinary exertions. If there be a soul which has a spark of energy in it, that energy is called forth, and frequently gives birth to great ideas on subjects of the first importance to the happiness, both of individuals, and of society, which would not have been produced in a season of repose. Cromwell's army was an army of reasoners. They disputed about religion, every man with his bible in his hand: and as they had all been formerly constrained to appear to think alike, they now broke their bonds asunder, threw them indignantly away, and began to argue, that every man has a right to think for himself without constraint from either priest or king. Mr. Baxter, who was, for a time, with the army, as chaplain to Whalley's dragoons, mentions that the soldiers of Cromwell's regi-

^b See Owen's Sermons and Tracts, folio.

^c Treatise of the Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes.

ment argued in behalf of the rights of conscience and private judgment in matters of religion; and that it was not the province of the magistrate to restrain them by his controul. The Remonstrants in Holland said many things well on the subject: their situation sharpened their wits, and gave soundness to their judgment. And the ingenious Bayle, in his commentary on Luke ii. 14. 23. treats the doctrine of religious liberty with singular ability.

But our own country has the honour of producing the ablest writer on this important doctrine. It is to the justly celebrated philosopher John Locke, that the world is indebted for the best treatise on religious liberty, which has ever appeared since the day that the chief priests and captain of the temple, and the Sadducees committed Peter and John to prison for preaching Christ^k.

By this great man, the subject of religious liberty

^k Being obnoxious to the English court, which was aiming to introduce popery, (for to wicked rulers the best men will always be the most obnoxious,) he retired into Holland, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-three, and there wrote his first letter on toleration, which he dedicated to the celebrated Limborch. It was published in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-nine in the Latin tongue, and translated into English the same year. Happily for the world, it was answered in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety by Mr. Jonas Proast, M. A. of Queen's-college, Oxford, who was afterwards an archdeacon. In reply to this gentleman, Mr. Locke, the same year, published his second letter on toleration. An answer to this from the same pen appearing in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-one, the public was honoured with Mr. Locke's third letter "for toleration," in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-two. After twelve years' silence, an answer appeared to this likewise Mr. Locke had begun a fourth letter in reply, but death called him away from the work; which is to be found in its imperfect state among his posthumous pieces.

is so well treated, the foundation is laid so strongly, and so deeply, the statement is so luminous, the reasoning so convincing, and the matter so applicable to all denominations of professors of religion, to all countries and times, and so remote from every thing of local prejudices or party spirit, that for any one to bring forward a confutation, is to prove that the sun does not give light at noon day. The youth, who wishes to improve his mind by just ideas of what he owes to rulers in respect to the exercise of his religion, and what rulers owe to him, does not render justice to himself, till he has made himself master of Locke's letters on toleration. What obligations do men owe to these superior minds, which, by their labour, dig truth out of the mine, or finding it already dug, but rough, unpolished and obscure, rub off excrescences, smooth its surface, and present the diamond before the eyes of the world in all its excellence, and in all its lustre. To such men a niche is due in the most conspicuous part of the temple of fame.

A third benefit, which king William wished to secure for the dissenters, was a *comprehension*. This name was given to a plan for making such alterations in the liturgy of the church as it was conceived would bring a considerable number of dissenters, especially of the presbyterians, within her pale, and to her altars. This measure was not now thought of for the first time. It was promised to the presbyterians, then the most powerful party in the country, by Charles the second before he left the continent to ascend the British throne, but was set aside by the act of uniformity. When the bad consequences arising from the want of it were felt, it was proposed to the non-con-

formists in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty-eight, and a plan for that purpose was drawn up by sir Matthew Hale, and it was patronized by sir Orlando Bridgman, lord keeper of the seals ; but so violent was the spirit of the times against every thing of the kind, that the commons refused to have the bill even brought into the house. Towards the close of Charles's reign, when the bill of exclusion was the subject of warm debate, a comprehension became a matter of consideration, but nothing could be done.

When the long and hasty strides which James made towards Rome, alarmed his protestant subjects, the bishops and clergy felt an uncommon terror ; and in that petition for which the seven bishops were sent to the tower, they mentioned " their tenderness for the dissenters, in relation to whom they were willing to come to such a temper as should be thought fit, when that matter should be considered and settled in parliament and convocation¹." The business was carried still further, for archbishop Sancroft, foreseeing that a change was at hand, and sensible of the evil effects at the restoration, for want of something being ready in the way of preparation for composing the differences of the episcopalians and presbyterians, in order to the formation of such an ecclesiastical constitution as would unite them both in the establishment, resolved to have a plan in readiness to be proposed and adopted if such an event should take place. Accordingly he set to work himself, and called in the assistance of several of his brethren of the clergy, Dr. Patrick, Dr. Sharp, and others, to make a draught of such alterations and amendments in the offices of the

¹ Calamy, p. 383.

church, as would be likely to satisfy the dissenters. The design was to improve and enforce the discipline of the church, to review and enlarge the liturgy, by correcting of some things, and adding of others, and (if it should be thought advisable by authority, when the measure should come to be legally considered, first in convocation, then in parliament) by leaving some few ceremonies, confessed to be indifferent in their natures, as indifferent in their usage, so as not necessarily to be observed by such as should make a scruple of them. And this good design was known to, and approved by the other bishops, who joined with the archbishop in this petition¹."

The new government being soon after settled, under king William, the metropolitan could not conscientiously take the oaths required, and after a time retired from Lambeth palace (the first instance of the kind on record) into private life. Those who differ from him in judgment, must honour him for his integrity. He who quits the see of Canterbury, with all its revenues and all its honours, to bury himself in obscurity, has a claim to the character of, at least, an honest man. One of the last acts of Sancroft, and his non-juring brethren, was, as has been mentioned, to move that besides the toleration, a bill for a comprehension of the dissenters might be brought in. It was introduced and debated, but it was a bolder and more difficult measure than the former. The act of toleration permitted them to live without the church; but the act of comprehension brought them to its very altars. That conferred neither honour nor emo-

¹ See Wake, bishop of Lincoln's speech at Sacheverel's trial. Calamy, p. 383, 384.

luments; but this introduced hundreds of new candidates for every department of ecclesiastical office. But as it was patronized by the king, it was supported by his ministers; some of the prominent parts were debated by the lords; and it was carried that kneeling at the Lord's supper should not be required of those who scrupled to receive it in that posture.

There was a clause in the bill that a certain number of persons, partly of the laity, and partly of the clergy, should, as in the days of Henry the eighth, and of Edward the sixth, be appointed to weigh maturely the subject, and to form a scheme of such alterations and amendments in the affairs of the church as might be deemed expedient, and to present them to parliament to be incorporated into the bill, and adopted by the legislature. This measure was by many of the temporal peers urged with great force of reasoning. "But, (says bishop Burnet,) I, at that time did imagine that the clergy would have come into such a design with zeal and unanimity, and I feared this would be looked upon by them as taking the matter out of their hands; and for that reason I argued so warmly against this, that it was carried by a small majority to let it fall. But I was convinced soon after that I had taken wrong measures; and that the method, proposed by the lords, was the only one like to prove effectual: but this did not so recommend me to the clergy, as to balance the censure I came under, for moving in another proviso of that bill, that the subscription instead of assent and consent should only be to submit with a promise of conformity^k." In consequence of this a commission was issued by the king

^k Burnet Vol. II. p. 10.

to thirty divines, ten of whom were bishops, which was in the following words:—

“ Whereas the particular forms of divine worship, and the rites and ceremonies appointed to be used therein, being things in their own nature indifferent and alterable, and so acknowledged ; it is, but reasonable that upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigencies of times and occasions, such changes and alterations should be made therein, as to those that are in place and authority, should, from time to time, seem either necessary or expedient.

“ And whereas the book of canons is fit to be reviewed, and made more suitable to the state of the church ; and whereas there are defects and abuses in the ecclesiastical courts and jurisdictions, and particularly there is not sufficient provision made for the removing of scandalous ministers, and for the reforming of manners, either in ministers or people : and whereas it is most fit that there should be a strict method prescribed for the examination of such persons as desire to be admitted into holy orders, both as to their learning and manners.

“ We, therefore out of our pious and princely care

¹ Ten of the commissioners were then bishops ; viz. Dr. Lamplugh, archbishop of York, Dr. Compton, Dr. Mew, Dr. Lloyd, Dr. Sprat, Dr. Smith, Sir Jonathan Trelawny, Dr. Burnet, Dr. Humfreys, and Dr. Stratford, who were the bishops of London, Winchester, St. Asaph, Rochester, Carlisle, Exeter, Salisbury, Bangor, and Chester.—Twenty other dignitaries were added to them : as Dr. Stillingfleet, Dr. Patrick, Dr. Tillotson, Dr. Meggot, Dr. Sharp, Dr. Kidder, Dr. Aldridge, Dr. Jane, Dr. Hall, Dr. Beaumont, Dr. Montague, Dr. Goodman, Dr. Beveridge, Dr. Battely, Dr. Alston, Dr. Tennison, Dr. Scott, Dr. Fowler, Dr. Grove, and Dr. Williams.

book was written soon after the time, when most of the members of the commission were still alive, had he introduced into his account any thing contrary to

the eighth, not to enter into any debates about making any alterations in church affairs without the king's special and immediate privacy and direction first given concerning such alterations. It was answered that that must be done either by an act of the king's own judgment, or by a private cabal (both which ways would be very exceptionable), or else by his majesty's commission, to a certain number of ecclesiastics to consult about and prepare what was necessary to be altered, as it was in the present case; moreover, the commissioners pretended not to make these alterations obligatory by virtue of a law, but only to get them ready to lay before the convocation. The very reports being not so much as to be referred to the privy council, least they might be subject to be canvassed and cooked by lay hands. However, the bishops of Winchester and Rochester, Dr. Jane, and Aldridge withdrew dissatisfied; and the rest after a list of all that seemed fit to be changed, was read over, proceeded very unanimously, and without any heats, in determining, as follows, (each article, as soon as agreed upon, being signed by the bishop of London.) *viz.*

"That the chaunting of divine service in cathedral churches shall be laid aside, that the whole may be rendered intelligible to the common people.

"That besides the psalms being read in their course as before, some proper and devout ones may be selected for Sundays.

"That the apocryphal lessons, and those of the Old Testament, which are too natural, be thrown out; and others appointed in their stead by a new calendar, which is already fully settled, and out of which are omitted all the legendary saints' days, and others not directly referred to in the service book.

"That not to send the vulgar to search the canons, which few of them ever saw, a rubric be made, setting forth the usefulness of the cross in baptism, not as an essential part of that sacrament, but only a fit and decent ceremony; however if any do, after all in conscience scruple it, it may be omitted by the priest.

"That likewise if any refuse to receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper kneeling, it may be administered to them in their pews.

"That a rubric be made, declaring the intention of the Lent fasts, to consist only in extraordinary acts of devotion, not in distinc-

truth, or dishonourable to the church, there is not a doubt, considering the temper of the age, but it would have met with deserved contradiction and exposure.

The alterations which were deemed expedient, having been agreed on, it was designed to lay them before the convocation, which was assembled in the

tion of meats: and another to state the meaning of Rogation Sundays and Ember weeks; and appoint that those, ordained within "the quatuor tempora," do exercise the strict devotion.

"That the rubric, which obliges ministers to read or hear common prayer publicly or privately every day, be changed into an exhortation to the people to frequent those prayers.

"That the absolution, in morning and evening prayer, may be read by a deacon; the word priest, in the rubric, being changed into minister, and those words "and remission" be put out as not very intelligible.

"That the gloria patri shall not be repeated at the end of every psalm, but of all, appointed for morning and evening prayer.

"That those words in the te deum, "thine honourable, true, and only Son," be thus turned, "thine only begotten Son." Honourable being only a civil term, and no where used in sacris.

"The "benedicite" shall be changed into the hundred and twenty-eighth psalm; and other psalms likewise appointed for the "benedictus and nunc dimittis."

"The versical after the Lord's prayer, &c. &c. shall be read kneeling, to avoid the trouble and inconveniences of so often varying postures in the worship. And after these words "give peace in our time, O Lord," shall follow an answer, promissory of somewhat on the people's part, of keeping God's laws, or the like: the old response being grounded on the predestinating doctrine taken in too strict an acceptation.

"All high titles, or appellations of the king, queen, &c. shall be left out of the prayers, such as "most illustrious, religious, mighty," &c. &c. only the word sovereign retained for the king and queen.

"Those words in the prayer for the king, "grant that he may vanquish and overcome all his enemies," as of too large an extent, if the king engage in an unjust war, and shall be turned thus; prosper all his righteous undertakings against thy enemies, or after some such manner.

month of December for this purpose. But in the choice of a prolocutor by the lower-house, the preference of Dr. Jane to Dr. Tillotson, blasted every expectation of success ; and they would not so much as take the subject into consideration.

“ Those words in the prayer for the clergy, “ who alone workest great marvels ;” a subject ill interpreted by persons vainly disposed, shall be thus, “ who alone art the author of all good gifts :” and those words, “ the healthful spirit of thy grace,” shall be the Holy Spirit of thy grace, healthful being an obsolete word.

“ The prayer, which begins, “ O God whose nature and property” shall be thrown out as full of strange and impertinent expressions, and besides not in the original, but foisted in since by another hand.

“ The collects, for the most part, are to be changed for those which the bishop of Chichester has prepared ; being a review of the old ones with enlargements, to render them more sensible and affecting, and what expressions are needful, so to be retrenched.

“ If any minister refuse the surplice, the bishop, if the people desire it, and the living will bear it, may substitute one in his place that will officiate in it ; but the whole thing is left to the direction of the bishops.

“ If any desire to have godfathers and godmothers omitted, and their children presented in their own names to baptism, it may be granted.

“ About the athanasian creed, they came at last to this conclusion. That least the wholly rejecting it should, by unreasonable persons, be imputed to them as socinianism, a rubric shall be made, setting forth, or declaring the curses denounced therein not to be restrained to every particular article, but intended against those that deny the substance of the Christian religion in general.

“ Whether the amendment of the translation of the reading psalms, (as they are called) made by the bishop of St. Asaph, and Dr. Kidder, or that in the bible, shall be inserted in the prayer-book, is wholly left to the convocation to consider of, and determine.

“ In the litany, communion service, &c. are some alterations made, as also in the canons, which I cannot yet learn so particular account of, as to give them you with the rest, as perhaps I may hereafter be able to do.” Thus far my friend’s narrative. Calamy p. 452—455.

Nor had the general bill better success in the house of commons. There was a considerable party adverse to the new government. Many were so strongly attached to the church as it was, that the idea of alterations filled them with disgust and horror. Others thought, that to yield to the desires of the nonconformists, was degrading to the establishment. But what most astonished the warm advocates of the bill, was that many members, who had always acted as friends of the dissenters, were hostile to the measure. This was particularly the case with those who, without particularly concerning themselves about religious disputes, acted upon the broad principles of general liberty. They are said to have reasoned thus.

“ If this bill pass into a law, two thirds of the dissenting ministers will enter the establishment. They will, in consequence of this, acquire the *esprit de corps* of the clerical order: at any rate their successors will. Our clergy were never the friends of liberty, but have always clung to the throne; and if they have themselves been caressed and secure, we have found them to be the advocates of prerogative, and unconcerned about the rights of the people. The puritans, the non-conformists, and the dissenters have, on the other hand, been the stedfast asserters of the liberties of Englishmen°. If all the present ministers remain without the pale of the church, they and the people will form a considerable body to balance along with the state whigs, the opinions of the clergy, and

° So absolute was the authority of the crown (in the reign of the Tudors) that the precious spark of liberty had been kindled, and was preserved by the puritans alone. And to this sect the English owe the whole freedom of their constitution. Hume's History of England.

by that means serve effectually for the preservation of the freedom of the English constitution. Should they, in consequence of an act of comprehension, enter the church, all these advantages will be lost. Those who remain dissenters will be few in number and inconsiderable, their influence will be small, and there is danger that the toleration granted, will not meet with due respect nor remain in force. Whereas if the number of those who continue out of the church be considerable, they will have an influence which will be beneficial to the cause of freedom, and the act, which tolerates them, will remain inviolate."

From such views they voted against the bill, and it was thrown out. Dr. Calamy speaks of the failure of the comprehension bill with bitter and deep regret. But at this distance of time, we are able to take a more enlarged view of the subject, than his circumstances could possibly present. The alterations proposed and made in the standard and services of the church, by such men as Tillotson, Burnet, Stillingfleet, Patrick, Sharp, Kidder, Beveridge, Tennison, Scott, Fowler, Williams, &c. justify the faults found with them by dissenters, and stand to this day as heralds, incessantly proclaiming that there are many things (six hundred alterations were made) in the church of England which stand in need of alteration and amendment. Of the attachment of these divines to the church of England, not a doubt can be entertained: their writings render that unquestionable. As to their abilities, natural and acquired, no age of the English church, either before or since, can produce at once such a number of superior men as were in that commission: and in many respects they en-

joyed advantages far beyond those persons who, in the dawn of the reformation, compiled the liturgy.

By the rejection of the bill, the church sustained a double loss. Instead of being enabled to take the benefit of the improvement of these excellent men, which would have rendered the service the first of liturgical compositions, to be compelled, for more than a hundred years longer, to use the obsolete, the harsh and uncouth phraseology of the sixteenth century, when our language was in a rude unpolished state, is an injury of no ordinary size. To deprive herself likewise of the services of so many hundreds of learned, pious, excellent, and zealous ministers, who would have returned to her communion, was a loss which words cannot express.

But whether the exclusion of the dissenting ministers from the establishment, by the failure of the bill, has been beneficial or detrimental to the highest interests of our country, and of mankind, is a question of a very different nature. As to the beneficial influence of the dissenters, on the preservation and establishment of political liberty in England, the resolution of that point may be safely left to the decision of the best patriots and the most enlightened friends of freedom, who have no connexion with their religious sentiments, and with their dissent. The other part of the question may be conceived to be of more difficult resolution. Some indeed may think it clear as light, that not allowing the dissenters to return to the bosom of the church, was to the detriment of religion, as they would in that case have had an opportunity of preaching to far more numerous congregations.

But it is not upon mere numbers that the question

rests : something else must be taken into the account. Some religious societies are voluntary, and their union is the result of choice. Others are formed by a geographical line ; and vicinity of habitation is the reason of their assembling for worship in the same place. Between a voluntary society of worshippers, and a mass of people living within certain boundaries, and called a parish, the difference is immense. Among four hundred of the former class the probability of doing good, is equal at least to two thousand of the latter. Taking the whole of England on an average, this is the case, unless the proportion be rated too favourably for a parish congregation. In support of this assertion many things might be adduced, for it is not hazarded at random, but made on an extensive view of the subject. Let what is said be duly weighed, that in a voluntary congregation of four hundred persons, where the Gospel is purely and faithfully preached, there are ordinarily as many true disciples of Christ, and as many instances of conversion, as in a parish of two thousand souls, where the clergyman preaches the same doctrine with equal fidelity and zeal. As for the parish minister, who labours in a city, or populous town (which is the only instance that could be alledged as an objection), his audience is not the parish population : it is a voluntary society, and bears a considerable resemblance to a dissenting congregation. Yet even here it will be found, on an average, that the advantage is in favour of the dissenters. There is an evidence of the comparatively small effect of evangelical preaching in a parish church, which occurs from year to year, when, on the demise of a good clergyman, one of a very different description fre-

quently succeeds; and it is most commonly seen, that the people of the parish attend on him just as they did on his predecessor; and though a few complain, the mass is satisfied. In how many instances is this the case, for one where the people, unable to sit under the new parson, form a society of their own, and choose a preacher to their mind. A few very laudable examples of this kind have occurred; but how few are they in comparison of the others: yet, of the success of a minister, and of the influence of his doctrine, there can scarcely be a more true barometer. The observation will now apply to Scotland too, where the people, in general, have been considered as better instructed in the principles of religion.

But a still more striking illustration of the subject appears in the case of the very men concerning whom the question is discussed. The non-conformists, before the restoration, were parish ministers: and for laborious diligence and zeal, as well as abilities and learning, they had but few superiors. Yet the fruits of these mens ministry appear to have been, in general, comparatively small. When they were silenced, and men of a very different character were, in most places, appointed to succeed, on an average, the number of those who adhered to their old ministers, and formed a separate society, was, generally, far from large. The size of most of the old dissenting meeting-houses, both in London and in the country, furnishes an incontestible proof of this. From these facts, and others of a similar nature, which might be adduced, it will be evident that too great a stress has been laid on the circumstance of mere number, without taking into consi-

deration the materials of which that number is composed.

The beneficial effects of the regulations of the New Testament for the government of a Christian society; the closeness and endearments of the relation between the members of it, and the pastor of their choice; the importance of maintaining purity of communion, and excluding the ignorant and the wicked from the table of the Lord; and the various modes of advancing religion which arise out of these, are all to be taken into account by every one who would investigate the subject with impartiality in all its bearings and in all its extent. And when every part of it is duly weighed, the pious pastor of a voluntary society of two hundred persons may receive encouragement from the thought, that in his congregation there is a larger portion of divine knowledge, of unfeigned piety, of godly zeal, than in ordinary parishes of ten times the population. When there is a congregation of four, five, or six hundred people voluntarily associating themselves for worship, the minister may consider himself on the level with the good parson of a parish containing two or three thousand souls in a country situation, or in a small town¹. In addition to this, it is to be remembered, that a parish-priest cannot move beyond the circle of his parish, without exposing himself to punishment for the sup-

¹ This remark applies, in a great measure, to every institution of the kind. People of no religion in a place are of the established religion, whatever its form may be. If we take out of a parish the absentees from public worship, the *now-and-then* attendants, the grossly ignorant who do not seek instruction, those who go to church from mere custom, without thought or reflection on spiritual things, and those who rest on the mere *opus operatum* as the

posed offence. England is the parish of the minister who is not fettered by the canons of an establishment. If he complain that his field of labour is too confined, why does he not widen it, and extend his efforts on every side? There is no canon in the New Testament to forbid him.

To resume the thread of history, a toleration being the only prize which the dissenters gained, they were duly sensible of its value, received it with lively gratitude, and endeavoured to improve it as an inestimable privilege. Enthusiastically attached to the government, and the order of things, as established by the revolution, they were justly regarded as amongst the most loyal subjects of the British empire. It is greatly to be lamented that a spirit of envy and ill-will towards the dissenters soon manifested itself among the clergy, who were much displeased at the liberty which had been granted them, and seemed disposed, had it been in their power, to snatch it away. Such is the testimony borne by a contemporary writer, who was of their own order. Concerning events which take place at any period, those who live at some distance may be able to form a more accurate judgment: but the spirit of a people, or body of men, and their feelings and tempers on particular occasions, are best delineated by the historian of the times. This advantage was enjoyed by bishop Burnet, in whose ample narrative

whole of their duty; and then select those who are concerned about the salvation of their souls, and those who worship God in spirit and in truth, and manifest the reality of their religion by denying themselves, taking up the their cross and following Christ; the calculation made above will not appear extravagant, nor unfair.

this unhappy disposition of his brethren is described. However, the shield of protection was held over them by the strong and swelling hand of government; and the enjoyment of all the comforts of public worship afforded them the sweetest satisfaction. Men who had been long deprived of this benefit, or who had attended at the risk of fine or imprisonment, and who, for their attendance, had often sustained these injuries, had learned to set a proper value on the sanctioned freedom of public worship in the face of day.

While the dissenters had no great reason to complain of any infraction of the express terms of the toleration act, there were different opinions respecting its extent. Various things, they conceived, were implied and supposed, which, though not expressed, must necessarily form a part of its benefits. The clergy, on the other hand, explained it with greater strictness, and insisted that what was not plainly expressed, it did not grant. The education of young men for the dissenting ministry was one of these things in which this difference of judgment first appeared. "If we have liberty of worship," said the dissenters, "we must have ministers to officiate:

"There were two parties among the clergy: one was faithful and firm to the present government; the other expressed a great esteem for jacobites, and in all elections gave their votes to those who leaned that way: at the same time they showed great resentment against the dissenters, and were enemies to the toleration, and seemed resolved never to consent to any alteration in their favour. The bulk of the clergy ran this way, so that the moderate party was far out-numbered. Profane minds had too great advantage from this in reflecting severely on a body of men that took oaths, and performed public devotions, when the rest of their lives was too public, and too visible, a contradiction of such oaths and prayers." Burnet, vol. II. p. 215.

but these ministers are not immortal: they must die, and we must have others to succeed them. These must receive instructions to qualify them: and academies are necessary for this purpose: and therefore it is plain they must be comprehended in the act. It would otherwise be a repetition of the fable of Tantalus; or of that Turkish policy, by which it is forbidden to Christians to rebuild their places of worship which have fallen into decay." The clergy were of a different mind, not merely the high-flying intolérant members of the hierarchy, but those who were accounted moderate in their sentiments respecting the dissent. In this list the names of Stillingfleet and Tillotson are found. The former having been promoted to the see of Worcester, his charge to the clergy, in his primary visitation, contains the following words:—"But if, after all, they (the dissenters) grow more headstrong and insolent by the indulgence which the law gives them; then observe, whether they observe those conditions on which the law gives it to them. For these are known rules in law, that he forfeits his privilege who goes beyond the bounds of it; that no privileges are to be extended beyond the bounds which the laws give them, for they ought to be observed as they are given. I leave it to be considered, whether all such who do not observe the conditions of the indulgences be not as liable to the law as if they had none." Tillotson's sentiments on the subject may be seen in his answer to doctor Sharp, the archbishop of York, who had consulted him respecting Mr. Frankland, an eminent dissenting tutor, who taught university learning within his diocese; and they discover how much

* Stillingfleet's Ecclesiastical Cases, vol. I. p. 51.

men, even the most reasonable, are influenced by situation^t.

For the consolation of the dissenters, the king was more tolerant than his clergy. By his authority, as head of the church, he checked that flaming zeal which blazed in this direction, to the alarm and injury of their fellow subjects : and as long as he lived, preserved the principles and practice of toleration in a considerable measure of force, notwithstanding the attempts of many malevolent men, who wished for its abridgement or repeal. From the bitterness of party, and the discovery of want of principle in many from whom better things might have been expected, he led but an uneasy life : and in the English crown the

^t "MY LORD,

Lambeth-house, June 14, 1692.

"Yesterday I received your Grace's letter concerning Mr. Frankland, with the copy of an address to your Grace against him. Yourself are best judge what is fit to be done in the case, because you have the advantage of inquiring into all the circumstances of it. If my advice can signify any thing, it can only be to tell your Grace what I would do in it, as the case appears to me at this distance. I would send for him, and tell him that I would never do any thing to infringe ~~the~~ act of toleration : but I did not think his case within it : that there were two things in his case which would hinder me from granting him a licence, though he were, in all things, conformable to the church of England ; first, his setting up a school, where a free-school is already established ; and then his instructing of young men in *so public a manner* in university learning, which is contrary to his oath to do, if he have taken a degree in either of our universities ; and, I doubt, contrary to the bishop's oath to grant a license for the doing of it : so that your Grace does not, in this matter, consider him at all as a dissenter. This I only offer to your Grace as what seems to me the fairest and softest way of ridding your hands of this business.

"I remain, my Lord, your Grace's very affectionate brother and and servant, J. CANT." Birch's Life of Archbishop Tillotson, p. 296—7.

- sharpest thorns were mingled with its gems. But he was a great man; his sentiments of religious liberty were liberal and enlarged, beyond the body of the clergy of the establishment, and the mass of the nobility and gentry of the land; and by helping forward the public mind with his example and influence, he contributed, in no small degree, to promote the disgrace of persecution, and to abate, or restrain, the furious wrath of bigotry. The following reign showed his value in this respect, and left regrets in the breasts of dissenters which were long felt, and a veneration for his memory which remains to the present day. William died on the eighth day of March, in the year one thousand seven hundred and two, in the fifty-first year of his age.

SECTION II.

STATE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY DURING THE REIGN
OF QUEEN ANNE.

WILLIAM was succeeded by Anne, the younger daughter of James the second. The heads of the Stewarts seem always to have been filled with the prerogatives of the crown: and as the blood of the Clarendon family ran likewise in her veins, we are not to wonder that she was a favourer of the Tories, and a bigot to the established church. She was married to prince George of Denmark, a good-natured easy man, but destitute of that strength and energy of mind which were needed to regulate hers. At her accession she found herself surrounded by a ministry of William's choosing, who had the power in their hands, and enjoyed the confidence of that part of the nation which approved of the revolution. Time therefore must elapse, and favourable circumstances occur, and men proper for her purpose be raised up, and presented to her, before she can place herself in the hands of such as may be more congenial to her wishes. The dissenters soon felt the influence of her accession; for in the very first year of her reign, a bill was brought into parliament to abridge their religious liberty, by putting a stop to *occasional conformity*.

An unwise, but a trifling occurrence, in the last reign had roused the more zealous sons of the church

to great indignation. Sir Humprey Edwin, while lord mayor of London, being a dissenter, carried the *regalia* of the city to a meeting-house at Pinner's-hall". This needless act was considered as a very heinous crime, and generated as keen wrath in the hearts of many zealous churchmen as ever Achilles felt towards Agamemnon. Such a circumstance, unimportant in itself, kindled the flame of religious contention, and made it blaze to a height which it is now not easy to conceive. It may, however, probably be considered rather as a pretext than as a cause. An occasion of quarrel was sought for, and here it was found.

But if we trace the matter to the source, it will be discovered in the dispositions of a considerable number, both of the clergy and of the laity. The second James, by the precipitate measures which he adopted to introduce the Romish faith, completely terrified the English protestant priesthood, who fancied that they already saw a popish hierarchy usurping their benefices and their functions. To preserve their station was an object which lay very near their hearts. Feeling the need of the dissenters to take their side against Rome, they readily made them the most ample promise, even to a participation of their loaves and fishes. When the prince of Orange had chased James and the fears of popery away; along with the terrors of thousands of the clergy, the goodwill to the dissenters, which they so warmly felt in the day of their calamity, flew away also; and the dissenters were thankful to obtain a toleration of their religious worship. Of granting this, many of them began to repent, and seemed to think, that hereby they had exceeded

^a Calamy, p. 361.

in kindness. But William's known sentiments, and their influence on public opinion, supported by a body of men of liberal minds and superior talents, among the nobility, gentry, and higher orders in the church, restrained their malevolence, and kept things in a tolerably easy state during the monarch's life. But no sooner had Anne sat down on the throne, than they began to rouse themselves; and the bill against occasional conformity was the first step towards the abrogation of the toleration act. The same gradual method of obtaining an object was pursued by the thirteenth and the fourteenth Louis of France, in respect to the edict of Nantes, from which their protestant subjects derived the exercise of their religion: and their final success in its entire revocation, which happened in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-five, was before the eyes of the enemies of religious liberty in England.

With the majority of the clergy, who envied the dissenters their liberty, a considerable number of the country gentlemen, and many of the nobility concurred. The influence of an established priesthood over these classes in society, is, at all times, great. A clergyman is usually the pædagogues of their childhood, the tutor of their youth, and the companion of their maturer years: he soothes their solitude, and partakes of their convivial hours. Their ideas on a variety of subjects they derive from his early instructions, and by him a tone, or way of thinking, is given to their minds which mingles itself with all the sentiments and conduct of future life. By strong minds, from the force of reflexion, and a proper improvement of intercourse with mankind, the effects of this influence may be thrown off; but the

generality of them it follows to the grave. Nor on this topic should the influence of the clergy on females, in the superior walks of society be unnoticed. To estimate the power which the clerical office, a liberal education, a highly cultivated mind, and elegant manners, must have upon the fair, is not difficult: it must be both commanding and extensive. Their influence again on their husbands, and especially on their children, and on their relatives, and on a numerous class of acquaintances and dependants, spreads far and wide the opinions of the clergyman, the prime mover of the whole. Such, at all times, and in all countries, must be the state of things in a very considerable degree: but in the days of Charles, and James, and William, and Anne, it was ten-fold more so, than at present.

The person will find himself involved in error who conceives that the state of society, in the higher walks, was the same as it is now. More enlightened and well-informed men than the generality of the nobility and gentry of Great Britain are at present, were never found in the same walks of life in any country, or age. But, from the restoration to the accession of the house of Hanover, the state of that class in society was widely different. The change produced by the restoration, and the dereliction of the former habits of sobriety and application, for the gaiety, dissipation and boisterous mirth which accompanied the returning monarch, had the most unhappy influence on the dispositions and manners of the great. That there were always numerous individuals who shone with distinguished lustre for their intelligence and liberality is attested by every page of the history of England. But with

the greater part, the case was widely different. To the mass of country squires, and to many of their superiors, the hares on their fields, and the foxes in their thickets, were the chief objects of pursuit abroad: and the kitchen and the cellar furnished the materials of enjoyment within doors. The cultivation of the mind was no part of their employment^x. Over such persons how easy was it for a man of talents and information to acquire a sway; for mind predominates over station. At that time too, the very office of a clergyman, without regard to personal character, carried with it a degree of weight not easily to be conceived by those who live when the state of society, and of sentiments in social life, is so widely different. From a variety of causes, the charm of mere office, both ecclesiastical and civil, is now broken, and character is become of essential importance. It was not so then; office and character however, when combined, carried with them almost irresistible force.

Such was the spirit of multitudes of the superior orders of the country, and of a majority of the clergy, when the restraints of William's firmness for religious liberty were removed by his decease. Queen Anne's accession flattered their hopes of bringing back the days of Charles the second, by stripping dissenters both of their consequence, and of their legal existence. The first step was to bereave them of every office which they held under government; and afterwards of all capacity of being employed in

^x For an ample account of the manners of the great in those days, the reader is referred to Addison's description of the tory fox-hunter. Chalmers's Preface to the Tatler; and Drake's Essays on the Spectator, &c.

future. Being thus humbled, they could more easily be crushed. That this was the design of the schism bill, and of the bill of occasional conformity, which afterwards passed, there is sufficient proof. But there must be a plausible pretext as a cloak to conceal the deformed nakedness of the measure. When Christ is to be condemned to the death of the cross, the chief priests and elders must find him guilty of blasphemy and treason, an enemy both to church and state. When the dissenters are to be spoiled of the blessings of toleration, some colourable reason must be held out, which will enable a man to look up with confidence, and wear the visage of conscious innocence, nay of meritorious rectitude, while he stands forth and argues in its defence. In the present case nothing was so easy, nothing so praise-worthy. "The church is in danger," (a cry as old as the days of the scribes and pharisees, during Christ's abode on earth,) served the purpose admirably well; and the hypocrisy of the dissenters, who took the sacrament at church to qualify themselves for civil offices, it was meritorious to express. If they could, with a safe conscience, take the sacrament sometimes at church, they should be obliged always to take it, or obliged never to take it. By thrusting themselves into public offices, they went beyond the limits of the toleration, and grasped at privileges which it was never the design of the legislature to confer. It was therefore full time to put a stop to practices so improper.

But such a statement was the effect either of misrepresentation or of error. Occasional conformity was practised by the chief men, both ministers and laity, of the presbyterians who composed by much

the largest portion of the dissenters, from the time that the act of uniformity passed. That same year there was a meeting of the principal ministers of London, who agreed that they would exercise their ministry as they had opportunity; but that they would continue to attend occasionally the services of the church of England, and communicate at her altars. The independents, in general, were of a different mind: but this was the common practice of the presbyterians, both in town and country, during the severe reigns of Charles and James, when they had no worldly benefit to gain by their conduct. Some of them continued, after the revolution, and were actually practising it, when the bill to prevent them was introduced, without any regard to the dignities or emoluments of civil office. The venerable names of Baxter, Howe, Bates, and P. Henry sanctioned the practice by their approbation and example.

In consequence of these ideas, notwithstanding the corporation and test acts, there were always dissenters, both in corporations and in offices under government, because these acts offered no violence to their conscience; and required them to do nothing but what they had frequently done when in private life. But while they joined occasionally, they did not choose to confine themselves entirely to the ministrations of the English church. They preferred the dissenting mode of worship and government, as well as the ministry of the non-conformists; and with them fixed their stated communion, as members of the churches which they had formed. When the revolution enabled the dissenters to erect places of worship, and to hold their assemblies in a public manner, the persons who attended them were more

easily observed and known. It is probable also, that a greater number might be admitted to civic honours, and public offices, and by that means the jealousy be increased. Hence the earliest opportunity was embraced to put a stop to the offence.

But this was not all their criminality, nor the sole cause of the introduction of the bill. While the clergy grudged the dissenters their hearers ; and the more narrow-minded members of the church of England wished to engross all the honours and emoluments of the country to themselves, there was an additional reason for the introduction of the bill. The dissenters, as a body were highly respectable for talents, character, and influence ; and the political party, into which they threw their weight, derived from them a considerable accession of strength.

It is a general maxim of unspeakable importance, which ought to be adopted as an unerring rule of conduct, that no religious body of men should become the adherents of any political party or division in the state, and attach themselves solely to it. But while they study to excel in every social virtue, and to be exemplary in their obedience to the laws of the community, they should, in the exercise of their rights as burgesses, or electors, act as individuals, and never as a body : and every one ought to judge for himself, and give his vote in favour of those whom he conceives best qualified to promote the public good. Such happily is the case at the present time, and the state of public opinion among the dissenters. Had they always acted in this manner, evils might perhaps have been avoided, which threatened them with utter ruin ; and the prejudices on the opposite side, which were so extremely injurious to their interests, might have been considerably soften-

ed, if not removed. If there be any instance in which they may appear publicly as a body, it is not on any political question, but in a case which respects religion and morals, and of so important a nature, and in relation to principles so generally acknowledged by good men of every denomination, that they may have the judgment and conscience of all pious people on their side. To act as a body in such a case, would have considerable effect on the rulers of the country; for it would be acknowledged to be an exertion in its proper place, and not designed to promote the purposes of a faction, or to embarrass the government.

The first dissenters may be thought to have acted too much as a political party in the state, and to have cast all their influence into one scale. But their conduct must not be condemned with severity; and due allowance must be made for the peculiarity of their situation. The whigs of those days were their friends; they had procured for them the act of toleration; they supported them against their enemies; and relieved them from a multitude of petty vexations with which they were teased. From the tories, on the other hand, they received nothing but contempt and asperity, with insult and injury, and a determined hostility to their very existence: all these evil dispositions the entrance of that party into power betrayed more clearly, and taught them to expect the worst. Will it not cease then to excite surprize, that they felt the warmest friendship for the whigs, and did every thing in their power to strengthen their cause. It seems indeed like an act of self preservation, which it would require the self-denial of an angel not to have performed. But it enraged the tories: and the

bill against occasional conformity was the first step towards their full revenge.

A new parliament had been chosen soon after the queen's accession, and it partook of her spirit, in a much greater measure than the last. Into the lower house the infidel St. John, the arch-champion of the tory party, with the aid of Bromley and Annesly, introduced the bill, on the fourth day of November, in the year one thousand seven hundred and two. The preamble expressed a sincere regard for the act of toleration, and a determination to preserve it untouched. The Spanish inquisition professes the most ardent affection for the persons whom they torture, and a zealous concern for their happiness. The bill purposed to enact, that if any person, in an office under government, or in a corporation, after taking the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England, should, during the time of his being in office, worship in any meeting-house, or in any house where there are more than five besides the family, he should forfeit a hundred pounds for the offence, and five pounds a day afterwards while he continued in his office, to be received by the informer, and recovered in the most summary manner. Afterwards, if, during a twelvemonth, he was not guilty of the crime of entering a meeting-house, but conformed fully to the church of England, and received the sacrament three times in the course of the year, he again became capable of holding offices. But if he relapsed into an attendance on dissenting worship, the sinner was to forfeit double the forementioned penalties, and forfeit his office, or employment; and not be again capable of holding one, till he had conformed for the space of three years, whereof oath was to be made in writing in

one of the courts of Westminster, or at the quarter sessions of the county in which he had his residence⁷.

To prepare the public mind for the reception of the bill, many sermons on high church tory principles were preached, and many bitter pamphlets against the dissenters were circulated, which poured forth all the gall of party malice. To these were added the abusive and virulent speeches in the lower house. So successful were the efforts, that the bill passed the commons with a great majority in its favour; and in the beginning of December was sent up to the lords. There every nerve was strained to carry it, and so little regard was paid to decency and consistency, that prince George of Denmark, the husband of the queen, a lutheran by profession, who usually worshipped in a lutheran chapel, and consequently a dissenter from the established church, after taking the test, came into the house and voted for the bill. Men in high stations are not always wise.

The lords did not object to the principles of the bill, but being more dispassionate than the commons, they proposed several alterations. They denied, what the commons had asserted, that every person to be admitted to any office or employment was by law obliged to be entirely conformable to the established church; or that this was the intention of the law, when it provided that every person to be admitted to offices, should receive the sacrament, according to the rites and usages of the church of England. They lowered the penalty from a hundred pounds to twenty; one-third to go to the queen, a second to the poor, and the other to the informer. They left out the

⁷ Calamy, p. 624—6.

five pounds a day, and all the latter part of the bill which respected future incapacity for office. They added several clauses of a mitigating nature².

Eager to obtain their object, the commons proposed a free conference with the lords. Managers were chosen by both houses, and they argued the subject with great ability and spirit. But the efforts of the commons were, for this time, in vain. They left the bill with the lords, expressing their hopes that they would not allow the nation to lose the benefit of so good a law. But the lords adhered to their amendments, and the commons refusing to adopt them, the bill was lost³.

Bitter was the distress of the dissenters when they saw their moderate privileges envied by those in power; and the court and the commons combined against them. The joy of their deliverance was proportionably sweet. It is the way of the great Sovereign of the church thus to exercise the faith and love, the dependence and submission of his disciples; and they receive much spiritual benefit from his dispensations. Their hearts are raised above reliance on man; and they look to God for help. He was, at this time, pleased to grant it: they saw his hand in their deliverance, and gave him the praise. But the wrath of their enemies, far from being assuaged, was more inflamed by the repulse; and they waited with eager impatience for another opportunity of attempting the accomplishment of their object. The dissenters therefore were not permitted long to

² Calamy, p. 627, 634.

³ On three several clauses, *to adhere*, was carried by a single vote, and each time by a different peer. Burnet, vol. II. A majority of the bishops was against the bill.

enjoy the consoling thought that the storm was blown over, and that they might rest in security and peace; for no sooner did the parliament meet again, in the beginning of November, in the year one thousand seven hundred and three, than the bill was introduced a second time into the lower house. To disarm, if possible, the opposition of the lords, it was altered in several of its parts. Instead of five, ten, besides the family, were necessary to form a conventicle. The penalty of a hundred pounds was reduced to fifty; and the fine of five pounds a day, while the person continued in office, was left out. After considerable debates it was carried by a great majority, and sent up to the peers. During the recess of parliament, the court had changed its mind; and many of those who voted in favour of the bill now absented themselves from the house. On the motion for the second reading of the bill, it was rejected by a majority of twelve. The bishops were divided on the question; but two more were against the bill than for it. Bishop Burnet signalized himself by his zeal for its rejection^b.

^b While the occasional-conformity bill was depending the second time before the commons, and the members of that body were giving loose to the most furious passions, a remarkable dispensation in the natural world proclaimed the dominion of the great Governor of the universe, manifested the dependence of his creatures on him for their safety and comfort, and filled the inhabitants of the land with terror. On Friday, the twenty-sixth of November, a storm, which had been gradually increasing for near a week, towards the evening of that day acquired an unusual degree of violence, raged during the night with increasing violence, and spread such desolation through the capital, and different parts of the country, as England had never witnessed before. Nor was its ravage confined to our island: most parts of Europe felt its fury.

Though twice repulsed, the tories were not discouraged ; but in the beginning of the next session of parliament, which met in October, in the year one

Divine judgments are poured forth upon the earth, that the inhabitants of the world may learn righteousness. By such an event, unthinking mortals are taught how easily, by permitting his winds to blow with greater force, God could avenge himself of his enemies ; that it is owing entirely to his mercy, which habitually controuls the elements, that they are the instruments of good, and not of evil ; and that we live in safety and peace in our habitations, and find them a sanctuary and not a grave.

In the year one thousand six hundred and sixty-one, on the eighteenth of February, there was a dreadful storm, which ravaged the southern parts of England ; an account of which is given in a book entitled, *Annus Mirabilis* : but it was not to be compared to this, either in violence or extent. For a fortnight it had blown hard, and was accounted dreadful weather ; but the nearer it approached to the fatal twenty-sixth of November the tempest more and more increased. On Wednesday the twenty-fourth, the wind was violent, but not so as to occasion any apprehensions till about four in the afternoon, when its fury was dreadful. It continued with unusual violence all the next day and night. On Friday morning, though it still blew very hard, there appeared to be no manifest danger till towards evening : the storm then grew louder and louder. At ten, the mercury in the barometer fell lower than it was ever known. It did not blow so hard before twelve, but that most families went to bed : but between one and two, few people that were capable of a sense of danger, were hardy enough to remain there, as most people expected that their houses could not withstand the violence of the storm. Yet the danger was greater without than within ; for tiles, bricks, and stones, from the tops of the houses, flew so thick in the streets, that no one durst venture out of doors, although his tottering habitation made him every moment dread its fall. From two o'clock the storm continued to increase till five in the morning : and from five to half after six it blew with the greatest violence. It was then so high, that unless it had abated, as it afterwards did, nothing could have withstood its rage. During this time, the greatest part of the damage was done. The darkness of the night, for it was about the change of the moon, added to the horror of the scene. In the

thousand seven hundred and four. They introduced the bill a third time, in a form not materially different from the preceding year. In order to insure success, it was proposed to tack it to a money-bill; because a bill of that description the lords are not permitted to alter. This was negatived by a considerable majority; but it was carried as a distinct bill, and sent

beginning of Friday, the wind blew from the west-south-west: about two it veered to the south-south-west: then to west; and about six, to west-by-north: and the more to the northward the wind was, the harder it blew. It shifted again to the southward about seven; as it did so, it gradually abated. "About eight in the morning (says the narrator of the story) it ceased so much that our fears were also abated, and people began to peep out of doors: but it is impossible to express the concern which appeared in every place; the distraction and fury of the night were visible in the faces of the people; and every body's first work was to visit and inquire after friends and relations. The next day or two were almost entirely spent in the curiosity of the people, in viewing the havoc the storm had made, which was so universal in London, and especially in the out-parts, that nothing can be said sufficient to describe it," p. 38. Though the extreme violence of the wind abated from the Saturday morning, the storm could not be said to have ceased till Wednesday, the second of December, about four in the afternoon, when, after weeks of blowing weather, there was a perfect calm; and the people, whose minds had been agitated in no less degree, enjoyed sweet tranquillity, and ceased from their fears. Its effects were dreadful beyond example, both by land and sea; houses without number, both in London and in the country, were unroofed; a great many were injured, and some were entirely laid in ruins. Above two thousand stacks of chimnies in the metropolis were blown down. A gentleman wishing to know the number of trees which were rooted up in the county of Kent, counted to seventeen thousand, but grew weary of his task before it was half completed. The damage done at sea, both in the navy, and among the merchant ships, was immense. See a particular account of the whole in a book, entitled, "The Storm, or a Collection of the most remarkable Casualties, Disasters, &c." printed in the year one thousand seven hundred and four.

up to the lords. The queen went to the upper house to hear the debates, which were enlarged on purpose to make her fully acquainted with the subject. On a division, it was carried against the second reading by a majority of twenty-one. Thus, through the good providence of God, the designs of the enemies of the dissenters, and of religious liberty, were again defeated: and in this state, matters continued for several years^c.

From the time of the revolution, the dissenters had suffered those inconveniences, which persons in their situation will always feel, when public opinion lags behind the spirit of the law. Even during William's reign there was frequent cause of complaint: violent clergymen bore hard upon them: harsh and unreasonable justices of the peace were backward to render the protection to which they were entitled: and individuals, whose hearts overflowed with malicious bigotry; or petty mobs, stirred up by their activity, were guilty of acts of lawless violence. But government was always ready to give redress; and their known good-will to the non-conformists checked many an evil-doer, and constrained him to throw away the weapons of his enmity. The death of William was considered as the signal for their chastisement: and as soon as the event was known at Newcastle-under-line, the mob assembled and demolished the dissenting meeting-house. Anne was known to be of a different spirit from her predecessor; and greater liberties, it was thought, might be taken without incurring danger or displeasure. Still, however, the great substantial benefits of the toleration were maintained, and continued to be enjoyed for

^c Calamy, p. 711, 12.

five years after the third rejection of the occasional-conformity bill.

While, from the delay of their enemies to introduce again this dreaded measure, the minds of the dissenters were calmed into security, an event occurred, which their wisdom could neither foresee nor prevent; and which, without any imprudence or fault of theirs, exposed them to many injuries, and introduced a system of the most determined hostility, which, by repeated acts, brought them to the brink of ruin. The instrument of God and man, in this mournful dispensation, was Henry Sacheverell, D.D. chaplain of St. Saviour's, in Southwark. His grandfather John, of St. John's-college, Oxford, minister at Wincanton in the days of presbytery, was ejected from his living by the act of uniformity. Being afterwards seized at a conventicle, he was imprisoned for three years, and the hardships of his tedious confinement brought him to his grave. His eldest son, differing in sentiments from his father, was the clergyman of St. Peter's church in Marlborough, and died in the midst of his days, leaving a numerous family in indigent circumstances. Henry was adopted by an apothecary in the town, who had been his godfather, who gave him a classical education, and afterwards sent him to Oxford, to Magdalen college.

By nature, Henry Sacheverell appears to have been endowed with those peculiar qualities and dispositions which fitted him for the champion of the high-church party. The whig writers speak of him with uncommon severity, and place him exceedingly low, both in talents and in virtues. Let due allowance be made for the bitterness of party zeal. But by his

friends, he is not much exalted in either of these respects. His excellencies were in another way. He had a fine person, a melodious voice, and a most graceful and impressive delivery. The fire of zeal for the church of England, in all her most extravagant claims of dominion, burnt hot as Nebuchadnezzar's furnace within his breast. His system allowed, nay, enjoined it as one of the first of duties, to hate all who were without her pale, so as to employ every opprobrious epithet to express his hatred: and he seems to have been at pains to form a collection of them for use in sermons for the fifth of November and thirtieth of January. The opposite party considered him as a hypocrite, and insisted that his zeal was only to advance his interest; and that the cry of the danger of the church was nothing else than the ladder by which he might climb to preferment. But there is no satisfactory evidence that this was really the case: it is far from being improbable that the man was really sincere. The character which he sustained did not require from him more than he really displayed.

In order to be, or to seem to be a puritan, there must be the appearance of superior sanctity, and a peculiar purity, and even severity of manners: but these are by no means necessary to constitute a high-church champion. Let there be a loud cry that "the church is in danger," and abundance of heat and fury against sectaries and fanatics, and nothing more is needful. In life and conversation he need not be a whit better than his neighbours: two or three of the ordinary vices of human nature will, by no means, injure him in the esteem of his constituents. Such being the system which satisfies his con-

science, and even appears meritorious in his eyes, his virtues and vices accord with his mistaken sentiments^d.

An over-weaning conceit appears to have been born with him. Arrogance, self-sufficiency, a contempt and hatred of all who did not accord with his vices, marked his character, and were developed in his conduct. When he applied for ordination to Dr. Lloyd, who was then in the see of Oxford, his false latinity called forth correction; but in opposition to the learned prelate, he insisted that he was right. So ignorant was he of theology, that ordination was refused to him for a season on that account. It was afterwards granted; and he was appointed to a small living in Staffordshire, where his peculiar cast of mind soon appeared. His restless soul was agitated day and night, and his fury could not be restrained within his breast, but must have vent; and a proper object he found out and attacked. He ac-

^d A Neapolitan shepherd came in anguish to his priest: "father have mercy on a miserable sinner. It is the holy season of Lent; and while I was busy at work, some whey spurting from the cheese-press flew into my mouth, and, wretched man, I swallowed it: free my-distressed conscience from its agonies by absolving me from my guilt." "Have you no other sins to confess," said his spiritual guide. "No, I do not know that I have committed any other." "There are," said the priest, "many robberies and murders, from time to time, committed on your mountains; and I have reason to believe that you are one of the persons concerned in them." "Yes," he replied, "I am; but these are never accounted a crime; it is a thing practised by us all, and there needs no confession on that account." The man was as sincere in his religion as any inhabitant of the kingdom of Naples; but both his judgment and his heart were led astray by a false and dangerous system. Sacheverell, whose soul was cast in a similar mould, like him, erred in his ideas of sin and duty.

cordingly reflected with bitterness on the memory of king William; he condemned the revolution; he was furious against the whig administration; he used, in these attacks, the most severe expressions, and seemed to court notice by provoking suffering. High church was his peerless *Dulcinea del Toboso*, to whom our knight-errant had sworn inviolable devotion; and, like his prototype of Salamanca, he sallied forth in quest of adventures.

Oxford was, on different occasions, the theatre of his prowess, which he exhibited there before a multitude of congenial souls. Growing bold by approbation, he appeared as preacher of an assize sermon at Derby "on the communication of sin," which procured him an increased measure of public notice. The adherents of the tory party in London hearing of his fame, called him up to be the champion of the metropolis. At St. Paul's, on the fifth of November, in the year one thousand seven hundred and nine, he delivered, before the lord mayor and aldermen, a discourse on 2 Cor. xi. 26, which he entitled, "The Perils of false Brethren in Church and State." Sir Samuel Garrard, who was the chief magistrate that year, expressed his warmest approbation of the sermon: but when he proposed to the aldermen to request that it should be printed, they refused their consent. Sacheverell, however, published it with a very flattering dedication to the lord mayor: and so eagerly was it sought after, that forty thousand copies were sold in the space of a few weeks. By the tories it was extolled to the skies, as a performance which proclaimed its author to be worthy of a bishopric: the whigs thought it entitled to flames worse than the hands of men could kindle; and that the person

who wrote it deserved to suffer the severest punishment*.

At this distance of time, it is difficult to find in Dr. Sacheverell's sermon just reason either for the praise of the one side, or the condemnation of the other. Different kinds of rant are to be met with in public speakers: there is quaker rant, methodist rant, popish rant; and there is, what is near akin to this, namely, high-church rant. Sacheverell's sermon was of the last sort. There must have been a peculiarly high degree of pre-disposition in the tories, when this sermon could rouse and charm them: and on the other hand, there is nothing so remarkably pointed that any of the whigs needed to apply it to themselves, or be enraged at the author. As to what he said against dissenters, that was meekly to be borne: thousands of sermons preached on the thirtieth of January have been equally, and thousands more severe; and he is unworthy of the name of a dissenter who cannot read such a performance with patience, and with pity. The church whigs had still less cause of displeasure, and appear extremely reprehensible for their irritability. Let the reader represent to himself a man, whose ideas of priestly dignity and power were somewhat, though but little, inferior to the church of Rome; who was displeased at people of a different communion enjoying toleration, because he conceived that his own church should fill the land; who was provoked almost to madness to see every subject, theological and ecclesiastical, discussed with freedom in books daily issuing from the press; and he has before his eyes

* Sacheverell's sermon at St. Paul's.

the picture of Henry Sacheverell, D. D. and chaplain of St. Saviour's, Southwark ; and of every high-church hero. If left to himself by rulers in church and state, a very harmless animal he is to others, though he may be exceedingly troublesome to himself.

What to do with the author of the obnoxious sermon became unhappily the subject of deliberation with the ministry. Lord Somers, it is said, advised that he should be prosecuted for the offence in a court of law. If a little contemptible cur barks at a man as he walks along the street, he consults his passion more than his character, if, instead of going on his way, he turns to it in a rage, and endeavours to beat out its brains. There is an unwillingness to punish, which governments should display in every thing of this kind ; it is necessary to the dignity of their character, and conduces to the safety of the state. An eagerness to catch at every bitter and hasty expression uttered against them, in a moment of irritation and wrath, betrays a littleness, as well as severity of mind, which would not have entitled them to a higher office than that of apparitors of the inquisition ; and discovers apprehensions of danger unworthy of men, who should be amply furnished with firmness and courage. The advice of Somers, though certainly strong enough, was over-ruled by his colleagues, who conceived that Sacheverell had pointed at them as by name ; and they unwisely determined to bring the matter before parliament, and in a solemn manner, establish his guilt, and award an exemplary punishment. Had they given him a fat living, or a bishopric, the danger of the church would, most probably, have vanished from

his eyes, and he would have ever afterwards been as quiet as a lamb, and as gentle as a dove.

Into parliament the cause was brought by Mr. Dolben, son of the former archbishop of York : and heavy complaints were made of the chaplain of St. Saviour's. So strangely were their minds heated with the subject ; and with so high a hand were things carried, that it was determined to impeach him as guilty of high crimes and misdemeanours. A committee, consisting of some of the first characters in the house for talents and respectability, was appointed to draw up articles of impeachment from the sermon. They were prepared, approved, and carried up to the lords, who acceded to them, and directed preparations to be made for the trial. Four heavy charges were brought against the doctor. He was accused of asserting, that the means used for bringing about the revolution were unjustifiable ; that the toleration granted by law to dissenters was unwarrantable ; that the church of England was in imminent danger under the present government ; and that the measures of the existing administration tended to the destruction of the constitution. In order to conduct the affair with greater solemnity and publicity, Westminster-hall was ordered to be fitted up for the purpose.

From various causes much time was consumed before the trial could commence ; and all that time Sacheverell and his friends were most assiduously employed in rousing the public mind against the ministry and the whigs, and in endeavouring to persuade the public that they had formed a determination to pull down the church, and set up the sectaries ; and that this was the first step towards the

accomplishment of their design. Nor were his friends now either few or inconsiderable. The high-church party among the clergy, which formed a considerable majority of the inferior orders of the hierarchy, favoured his views. The whole body of the tories also ranged themselves under his banners. Some of them, from the heart, entered into all Sacheverell's views, while others felt nothing of cordial attachment to the man, but hoped that, by professing zeal for the safety and prosperity of the church, they might be enabled to drive out the whig administration, and govern in their place. It was a disappointment to them, that the reins of authority had not been put into their hands at the queen's accession; they were, therefore, now the more anxious and alert to improve the present opportunity. So well did these men perform their parts, especially by the assistance of the clergy in their public discourses from the pulpit, that the minds of the multitude were wrought up almost to phrensy.

The whigs perceived their error too late; and before the trial commenced they were sensible that they had brought themselves into a situation of the most imminent danger. How to mitigate the evil, and, if possible, render it productive of benefit to themselves, and to their cause, became now the subject of deliberation: and it was resolved to bring forward all the great principles of the revolution, and of liberty; and by contending for these to interest the public in their favour. But it was in vain: a passion for liberty was unable to contend with the passion for the church.

On the twenty-seventh of February, in the year one thousand seven hundred and ten, the trial began,

and was managed, on the part of the commons, with singular ability by Sir Joseph Jekyll, Mr. Eyre, General Stanhope, Sir Peter King, and above all by Sir Thomas Parker, who entered with his whole soul into the business, and brought his superior talents to bear upon Sacheverell, and the sentiments which he had maintained. To enter into a particular relation of the proceedings of the court, does not coincide with the plan of this work, and would occupy too much room. An ample narrative is given in the histories of the times, and especially in an account of the trial, to which the reader is referred^f.

When the managers of the commons had brought forward their accusations, in support of which they entered into an elaborate defence of the principles of civil and religious liberty, of the revolution, and of the dissent; Sir Simon Harcourt, and the other advocates for Sacheverell, appeared in his defence. With much ingenuity and judgment they eluded the force of the arguments which his accusers had adduced, by allowing their truth, and acknowledging their weight. Instead of saying any thing against the revolution, the toleration, or her majesty's ministers, they only insisted that the doctor did not speak against these, and that his words conveyed another meaning: and they justified the discourses as inculcating general duties, without descending to notice particular exceptions. After his council had concluded the defence, he himself read a well-composed vindication of his conduct, which had been drawn up by Atterbury, Smalbridge, Friend, and Moss, and corrected by Sir Simon Harcourt. It was uttered

^f Burnet, vol. II. Tindal's Continuation of Rapin, vol. XXIII. Somerville's History of the Reign of Queen Anne.

with all that boldness and confidence with which nature had so eminently endowed him. He asserted that he had always spoken respectfully of the revolution, of king William, of the protestant succession, and of the queen and her government. He, however, strenuously asserted the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance, as being the doctrine of the church in which he was brought up, and at whose altars he had the honour to officiate: and he concluded with many pathetic expressions, designed to move the audience to compassion, and with the most solemn asseverations of his innocence, in the sight of that God who searcheth the hearts of the children of men. This, say the contemporary writers of the whig party, while it excited the multitude to pity, filled with inexpressible horror those who knew the man, and his ordinary conversation. Many, who took no part in the business were astonished at solemn declarations so contrary to the doctor's avowed sentiments, and were beyond measure shocked at his hypocrisy^z. After a full investigation of the business by the lords, for the space of three weeks, he was found guilty of the charges brought against him, by a majority of seventeen voices: and their sentence was, that his sermons, at Derby and St. Paul's, should be publicly burnt by the hands of the hangman, and along with them the decree of the university of Oxford, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-three; and he himself was prohibited from preaching for the space of three years.

During the time of the trial, the doctor, who had two of the chief men of Oxford for his bail, lodged in the temple, and went every day to Westminster in a

^z Burnet, vol. II. Tindal, vol. XXIII. p. 341.

coach, attended by an immense assemblage of people, who strove to kiss his hand, and paid him the lowliest obeisance. Those of a superior rank, from their windows and balconies, gave him demonstrations of attachment and respect. So zealous were his adherents for the glory of their idol, that they compelled every passenger to do him honour, and to shout the watch-word of the party, "the church and Sacheverell." Members of parliament were reduced to the same necessity. They surrounded the queen's sedan, in her way to the house of lords; and to impress her with their sentiments, they cried, "God bless your majesty, and the church; we hope your majesty is for Dr. Sacheverell^b."

The next step was to vent their fury against those whom they considered as enemies of that church of which Dr. Sacheverell was the champion. The houses of the managers, of the bishop of Salisbury, and of some of the most zealous of the peers, were threatened with destruction. They vowed vengeance against the house and church of Dr. Hoadley, a celebrated low-church man, who, in several discourses on public occasions, and in other writings had strenuously defended the principles of whiggism and the revolution.

But their heaviest wrath fell on the dissenters, who had taken no active part in the matter. These heroes for high church, like their brethren in other ages, united zeal and robbery together; for they plundered the houses of several private members of that body;

^b The speeches delivered in the course of the trial, and indeed the whole proceedings, are contained in a duodecimo volume, entitled, "A complete History of the Affair of Dr. Sacheverell." Printed in London, 1711.

and though they abhorred their faith, had no objection to a share of their goods. But their places of worship felt the heaviest weight of the vengeance of the mob. They began with Daniel Burgess's meeting-house, in Cary-street, and having torn down the pulpit and the pews, committed them to the flames, in Lincoln's-inn-fields, crying out after the example of their brethren at Ephesus, "high church and Sacheverell." Mr. Earle's meeting-house, in Long-acre; Mr. Taylor's, in Leather-lane; Mr. Bradbury's, in the neighbourhood of Fleet-street; Mr. Wright's, in Blackfriars; and Mr. Hamilton's, in Clerkenwell, shared the same fate. Threatenings were uttered against many others, which would, no doubt, have been put into execution, but for the stop which was soon put to their lawless violence. Nor was it the rabble alone which was concerned in such excesses: according to whig testimony, they acted under the influence of men of elevated rank, who were seen directing their operations, and encouraging them by approbation and reward. But they were checked in the midst of their labours. By the spirited exertions of the queen's guards, the mob was dispersed, and quiet restored; and such precautions were taken, as insured tranquillity during the remainder of the trial¹.

In the course of this remarkable business, Sacheverell was surrounded by the clergy, most of whom espoused his cause; and the queen's own chaplains stood about him as his friends. The heads of the tory party appeared as his patrons; caressed those of his brethren who were the warmest in his cause; and

¹ Calamy, p. 731. Burnet, vol. II. p. 542. Tindal, vol. XXIII. p. 343, 4.

by their elegant hospitalities animated them to still greater exertions in his favour. The doctor himself displayed his appropriate character. Not an inch of the self-sufficiency and arrogance which had hitherto accompanied him in his progress, did he lose in Westminster-hall. He scowled on his accusers with contempt and disdain. In consulting with his friends, he betrayed that arrogance of conceit, and assurance of petulant infallibility, which rendered it difficult for them to conceal their disgust and chagrin. The acclamations of the multitude he received with an air of haughtiness, blended with self-complacency, as an honour scarcely adequate to his merits. It is said too, and may be easily believed, that he set himself up in all companies as an oracle on every subject, whether relating to church or state; whose decisions must neither be contradicted nor called in question. The man little thought, that, instead of being the head of the party, as he conceived, he was but its tool^k.

The decision of the lords certainly furnished just matter of triumph to Sacheverell and the tories: for supposing him to be really guilty, how small must the offence be, which three years abstinence from preaching was sufficient to expiate. He was every where received by his friends with extasies of joy: bonfires and illuminations testified the exultations of his adherents; and those who would not join in their demonstrations of gladness, suffered for their firmness: The flame spread through every part of the country, and the dissenters unhappily found ridicule and reproach to be the lowest kinds of suffering. Their personal safety was in many places endangered, their

^k Burnet, vol. II. Tindal.

houses injured, and their places of worship threatened, mutilated, and destroyed¹.

Sacheverell's journey into Wales, which happened some months after the trial, in order to take possession of a living, while it displayed the height to which party spirit was raised, proved an additional source of uneasiness to the dissenters. In the places through which he passed, he was received with little less than regal splendour. Hundreds and, in some parts of the country, thousands of men in arms attended him from town to town. The clergy paid their homage to him with the most endearing cordiality, as the champion of the church, and of their order. Magistrates appeared in all the insignia of office to receive him into their precincts: while the tory nobility and gentry welcomed him to their seats, and treated their guest with the most distinguished honours. Wherever these demonstrations of attachment were displayed, there appeared at the same time a spirit of hatred and revenge against his and the church's enemies, for they were conceived to be one. In this unhappy predicament, the dissenters were always considered; and their persons, their families, their habitations, and above all their meeting-houses were exposed to the most serious injuries, and felt the wanton fury of unfeeling men, who were intoxicated with drinking, to the very dregs, the full cup of high church fanaticism. The

¹ At Exeter, Sherbourne, Cirencester, Oxford, Gloucester, and Pomfret, and other places, the meeting-houses and the habitations of the dissenters felt the effects of their wrath. One of their places of worship at Bristol was pulled down, and the materials cast into the river. Zealous church people had their children christened by the name of Sacheverell, and some of them on their death bed, said to their ministers, "you can do us no good, but if Dr. Sacheverell was here he could save us." History of Sacheverell. p. 380.

sting left in the soul by such treatment remains longer, and is productive of more pernicious consequences to the peace and welfare of a country, than superficial observers can conceive.

How insignificant a circumstance will sometimes set a whole nation in a flame, especially when the tinder-box of the clergy is well provided with every material, and their skill and strength are exerted in the matter ! The ignorance of the mass of the labouring people, and of many of those above them, was deplorably great. Ignorance is the fruitful mother of bigotry and false zeal : and the cause of that religion which can be promoted by blasphemy, drunkenness, and debauchery could not have found more able champions, whose ardour increased with their intoxication and excesses, and who, in proportion as they grew more wicked, became more fervid in their zeal^m.

^m To the ignorance of the mass of the people, which rendered them the easy prey of a religious demagogue, a failure of the preceding harvest gave an additional stimulus. Provisions were remarkably dear. The labouring classes were very much straitened, and doubtless the long continuance of the war, which was justly become unpopular, tended to sour their minds, and to prepare them for a public manifestation of their discontent. This ill-humour was heightened by a circumstance which brought great odium on the ministry, though no blame could be justly attached to their conduct. In the preceding year, a considerable number of Germans, driven from the Palatinate, their native soil, by distress, sought refuge in England, which, greatly to its honour, has often been the asylum of the miserable, and were entertained, both by the public, and by individuals, with great benevolence and compassion. That the country should be sensibly affected by acts of hospitality to a few thousand strangers is absurdity itself. But the labouring people thought so ; and finding provisions dear, they fancied that an encampment of Palatines in the vicinity of the metropolis was the cause. As they were fed at the public expence, the ministers of state were the authors of the sufferings of the poor

The sufferings of the dissenters, by lawless mobs, were but the beginning of sorrows. It was the object of the tories to crush them entirely, and such would have been the effect, as it was the design of Sacheverell's triumph, had not death been their friend, and by one stroke of his hand frustrated all the purposes, and all the wishes of their enemies.

Queen Anne regularly attended Dr. Sacheverell's trial. Her heart, from nature and education, was with the tories : circumstances, however, had hitherto kept her in the hands of the whigs, who are accused of not having treated her with all the respect which was due. But the timidity of her natural disposition, and the fear of evils from a change, had hitherto detained her in their power. Their arguments on the trial were not much calculated to gratify her taste. To be told that she derived her authority from the people, that her best title to the crown depended on acts of parliament, and that in case of oppression subjects might resist, and dethrone the tyrant, were political dogmas which it required a far stronger mind

English. Their displeasure was heightened by another consideration : these poor people were not of the church of England, and it was an aggravation of the crime to take its children's bread, and give it to foreign presbyterian dogs. These causes of discontent were fomented by the industry of the tories, who asked, if they did not see that it was the design of the whig administration, by introducing, and afterwards naturalizing, so many foreign protestants, to increase the number of dissenters, and thus first weaken, and afterwards overthrow the established church. Such politicians as the labouring people of that day, were better qualified to believe than to reason ; and by the heartiness of a belief, which was not without its corresponding works, they were prepared to advocate the cause of Sacheverell, in all those ways which zeal of heart and violence of hands required. The Londoners gave the tone to the minds of their brethren in the country.

than Anne's to relish and approve. They must have shocked all the tory feelings of a frame in which the blood of the Stewarts flowed with so strong a tide. On the other hand, the assertions of Sacheverell and his adherents, that rulers derive their power from God, and are accountable to him alone, and that resistance, in any case to their authority, is a damnable sin, must have been sweeter to her taste than honey from the honey-comb. The marked attachment which so large a portion of the people shewed for the supporters of these opinions, and the odium which fell so heavily on the whigs, as materially to affect both their character and influence, emboldened the queen to shake off that party, under whose direction she had hitherto acted, and to throw herself into the arms of the tories^a.

^a The soul of Anne was cast in the same mould as her father's. They thought and felt alike : but the object of their idolatry was different : James's was the church of Rome, Anne's the church of England. Exceedingly limited in its capacities, it seemed framed for being the seat of a bigotted attachment to her religious system ; and this disposition was cherished under the tuition of Compton, bishop of London. Finding a mind adapted to his purpose, he crammed it full of those narrow principles which are not unbecoming a monk in his cell, but are inconceivably pernicious to a sovereign on the throne. A nation, which commits the education of the heir apparent of the crown to a bigot for a religious sect, is sowing hemlock to poison the next generation, and is planting woe for them to reap. A wrong bias given to the youthful mind, may retard or prevent the happiness of millions ; and may keep alive the flame of religious animosity among different sects, so as considerably to diminish the strength and endanger the safety of the country. The same pupil, under the fostering care of a Tillotson, or a Burnet, by acquiring from the dignified tutor an enlarged mind, and a liberal heart, would have treated all with kindness, and united all in the bonds, at least, of forbearance and affection, of harmony and peace.

A step so bold, and so important, could not be effectually taken without a new parliament, which though some partial changes in administration soon appeared, was necessary to an entire alteration in the system. This measure was considerably facilitated by that tone which the trial of Sacheverell gave to the public mind. The clergy heightened the effect by their discourses; and while preparations were made for the dissolution, they strenuously recommended both from the pulpit, and in their private intercourse with their parishioners, candidates who were zealous for Dr. Sacheverell and their church°. Such is the testimony borne by bishop Burnet, whose office and situation enabled him to judge and to speak with certainty on the subject. A tory ministry, and a tory house of commons, were Sacheverell's bequest to his country. The value of the legacy, with respect to the dissenters, will be seen in the following pages: and their power will be found to have been exercised with as little honour to their country, as tenderness to the dissenting body. Harley, St. John, Harcourt, and others of the same spirit, now filled the chief offices of state, and had the sole direction of public affairs.

The first thing under their administration which affected the dissenters, was the introduction of the old bill against occasional conformity. For seven years it had slept, but from the complexion of the times fears were entertained that it would awake again;

° Such a spirit of violence prevailed through all the country, that thousands of whigs, from a regard to personal safety, dared not exercise their right of election; and many, who did, suffered severely for their boldness. Burnet, vol. II. p. 554.

and these fears were increased by the political changes that took place in consequence of Sacheverell's triumph, which brought their enemies into power. Nor were they vain ; for though the business was not immediately taken up, it was not lost sight of ; and on the fifteenth of December, in the year one thousand seven hundred and eleven, the earl of Nottingham, a zealous supporter of the church, who had lately gone over to the whigs, brought into the house of Lords a bill which embraced the object for which the tories had been so long earnestly struggling. It was entitled "an act for preserving the protestant religion, by better securing the church of England, and for confirming the toleration granted to protestant dissenters by an act for supplying the defects thereof." From a lord, whose word of honour, on account of the superior dignity of nobility, is equal to another man's oath, who would expect to find that in a bill with such a title, it was proposed to be enacted, "if any person who filled an office or place of trust and profit under government, and common-council men in corporations, who should be present at any meeting for divine worship, where there were more than ten persons besides the family, in which the liturgy was not used, should, upon conviction, forfeit the said office and place of trust and profit ; and continue incapable of enjoying any such situation, till he should be able to make oath, that he had not been present at any conventicle during a whole year, and in that time had at least thrice received the Lord's supper according to the rites and usage of the church of England."

That the tories, who had never concealed their enmity to dissenters, should introduce such a bill, was naturally to be expected. It was the boon

which they had promised to the high church zealots for their support. It was looked for in the preceding year, and as one whole session had been allowed to glide away without the measure being brought forward by the new ministry, they complained loudly of the tardiness of their friends. At last, to their astonishment, a peer, who had bid adieu to the tories, and gone over to the whigs, brings forward these devoted sheep to the altar, as if the sweet savour from the sacrifice of the dissenters' privileges was to be the reward of his apostasy. The whig lords felt a parental fondness for their convert, and almost unanimously supported the bill, so that the tories found it difficult to come in for any share of the credit of a measure, for which they had before laboured thrice in vain, and in which they had been opposed by a majority of peers, both spiritual and temporal, with success. How changed are their sentiments now, concerning the subject of religious liberty, while the cause remains precisely the same ! When men act on expedients, and not from principles, nothing can be looked for but inconsistencies which degrade themselves, and plunge into ruin those who had the unhappiness to place dependence on them. By one such step public men lose their character, and with it their influence on the most virtuous part of society ; and are ever afterwards viewed with suspicion by those who were before most strongly attached, as persons who are in pursuit of their own private interest, and not the public good. " I came to you alone," said Nottingham, " but if I be successful in this affair, others will follow me." The whig lords sighed for their former honours ; and in order to gratify those who might have it in their power to render them assistance, they

let the vengeance of the tories fall on the dissenters, and even stretched out their hands to help them to inflict the blow.

In three short days the bill passed the lords, and was transmitted to the commons, who in as short a time returned it, with the addition of a penalty of forty pounds on conviction of the offence of being at a conventicle, to be paid to the informer. Not to reprobate unprincipled conduct, and the wanton sacrifice of virtuous maxims to the hope of advancing political interests, especially when such conduct appears in the highest ranks of society, both in church and state, would be to abandon the cause both of God and man^p. With what calmness do they ruin thousands of respectable families, and wring the hearts of multitudes with all the bitterness of the most poignant distress. From the revolution, great numbers of dissenters, conceiving themselves secured by the pledge of the English legislature in the toleration act entered into offices under government, were extensively employed, had acquired the habits of their station, and were unqualified for obtaining support in any other way. To ruin them all both tories and whigs join.

^p Bishop Burnet, who was very zealous against the bill in the earlier part of this reign, and who takes a great deal of credit to himself for his opposition, and that of a majority of the bishops, relates the last agitation of the subject very briefly, and with a great deal of *sang froid*. How much tranquillity of mind, and philosophical calmness men display, when their neighbour's interests only are at stake. He concludes his account thus: "all the excuse that the whigs made for their easiness in this matter, was that they gave way to it, to try how far the yielding it might go towards quieting the fears of those who seemed to think the church was still in danger till the act passed; and thereby to engage them to concur with them in

The French and Dutch protestants petitioned to be heard against the bill, and to be exempted from its effects ; but no attention was paid to their request. Application was made by the dissenters to Harley the treasurer, whose family was chiefly among the presbyterians, and who himself had lived in communion with them during the greater part of his life. But it was of no avail. Is it every day the statesman is to be found, whose religious principles make all political considerations submit to their dominion ? While indignation is roused at the view of tyranny by the side of the throne, in the abandonment of virtuous maxims, political wisdom must condemn the narrow-minded policy of the rulers of a country, who deprive the community of the services of any one class of the people, and prevent men of superior talents, of tried integrity, and of extensive influence from bringing all these into action for the public benefit. May the time soon arrive, when a regard for the general welfare shall gain the ascendancy over the unreasonable prejudices of religious bigotry, and political party zeal. Is it not remarkable, that those who have argued most strenuously for the doctrine of restrictions, whether clergymen or laymen, and have been almost petrified with terror at the idea of persons of religious denominations different from their own being admitted to public offices, have never expressed any fears of danger from the admission of men who have no religion at all ? Yet surely those who have no religious principles to urge them to duty,

those important matters which might come before them. It must be left for time to shew what good effect this act may have on the church, or what bad ones it may have on dissenters. Vol. II. p. 585—6. *Surely men of high degree are a lye.* Psa.

and restrain them from evil, must be the most injurious to the community, and may justly be considered as persons of whom every good man should entertain the greatest dread.

The degradation which the dissenters suffered from the bill, must have been felt by them all, as the grossest insult ; and considered as an act of the most flagrant injustice to the body, by depriving them of the capacity of attaining situations and offices to which they had naturally an equal right with the rest of their fellow citizens. As to the measure of injury sustained, dissenters who were in places under government, and their families, and such as were educated with a view to the possession of them, had reason to complain that they were most cruelly treated. By the rest, however wickedly it was intended for their ruin, it might be converted into benefit. Those who will be contented to let others enjoy public offices of trust and profit, and will betake themselves to the employments of private social life, will have little reason to complain. Agriculture, trade, manufactures, and commerce present full scope to talents, and hold out to industry the most ample rewards. The independence too which they confer, leads to a satisfaction and dignity of mind, as well as to a comfort in outward circumstances, which no one, who estimates aright the true happiness of life, can expect to find in public situations. In most of these the rewards of labour are scanty, and far inferior to what the industrious man of business will attain : and in others, where the emoluments are great, as it depends on the nod of a minister, or his dependents, to bestow, so the continuance depends on his good pleasure ; and whenever he is offended, whether justly or not, he

can take them away. Sage experience teaches those who have served the longest apprenticeship to life, the wisdom of the woman who, when asked by the prophet, "Wilt thou be spoken of to the king, or to the captain of the host," made this answer: "I dwell among mine own people."

When the act against occasional conformity passed, the dissenters might naturally suppose that they had now felt the worst, especially as one of the clauses of the bill was, "that the toleration should remain inviolable in all time to come." For surely, if truth were to be banished from the common intercourse of men, it ought to continue honoured in parliaments, in courts, and on thrones. Bitterly is it to be lamented when this is not the case: and it is painful for the historian to record the events of such a season of deep depravity. By the law which had been lately made, enough, it might be thought, was done for the full security of the church from the very shadow of danger. But something more was now found necessary: and the safety of the established religion, was made the stalking-horse to conceal the designs of the high-tory party in the state. The attachment of the dissenters to the principles of civil liberty, was found to be unalterable: indeed it arose out of their principles; for to civil liberty they were indebted for their very existence in the country. On this account they were naturally led to side with the whigs, whose professions were in favour of the sentiments which they held. Rage filled the breasts of the tories, who knew their determined firmness; and as they could not hope to gain them to their side, they were resolved to crush them by successive measures, which, while

they avoided the odium of doing it by one violent blow, would as certainly accomplish the object. This policy had been employed against the protestants in France, and they had witnessed its complete success. Such was the reasoning of men, who, like Pharoah of old on a similar subject, said, "let us deal wisely." It was the purpose of Pharoah, and his ministers of state, to extirpate the Israelites as a distinct people: and in order to accomplish it they framed a decree, that the male children should all be drowned. A more refined policy prevailed in the cabinet of Anne. Having agreed on the destruction of the dissenters, their determination was to deprive their children of an education according to their own principles: so that, unless they chose them to remain ignorant and untaught, their instruction must be from masters who maintained principles which they disapproved, and which were destructive of their own; and who indeed had their destruction in view. Julian, the apostate from the religion of Jesus, had adopted this refined barbarity of political wisdom in regard to the Christians; conceiving, no doubt, that ignorance would prepare their minds for returning to the absurdities of paganism. From him, most probably, was the lesson learnt; for Julian's writings have been the delight of every infidel, and were, doubtless, oracles of the man in whose breast the schism bill originated. St. John, the infidel St. John again stood forth as the champion of the church of England: and as he had been called up to the lords by the title of viscount Bolinbroke, Sir William Windham brought the bill into the lower house on the twelfth day of May, in the year one thousand seven hundred and fourteen. By this bill it was pro-

posed to be enacted, " that no person should keep any public or private school, or seminary, to teach or instruct youth, as tutor or schoolmaster, unless he subscribed this declaration : ' I (A. B) do declare that I will conform to the liturgy of the church of England, as by law established,' and shall have had, or obtained, a licence from the archbishop, bishop, or ordinary of the place, under his seal of office. And whosoever should be found doing so without these qualifications was, upon conviction, to suffer three months imprisonment. No licence was to be granted, unless the person produced a certificate that he had received the sacrament according to the usage of the church of England, at some parish church within the year. If, after this, the schoolmaster was to be present at a conventicle, or any other worship than that of the church of England, he was to be liable to three months imprisonment, and from thenceforth incapable of teaching in any school or seminary, or instructing any youth as tutor or schoolmaster."

The next clause merits insertion in the very words of the act ; " and be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any person, licensed as aforesaid, *shall teach any other catechism than the catechism set forth in the book of common prayer*, the licence of such a person shall, from thenceforth, be void ; and such person shall be liable to the penalties of the act." A person who, for the foregoing offences, had lost his licence, in order to be capable again of acting as a schoolmaster or tutor, must be able to make oath in a court of justice, that, during the space of twelve months, he had not been present at a conventicle for dissenting worship, and had received

the sacrament three times during the year, according to the usage of the church of England.

Such was the schism bill, the severity of which must shock the feelings of every ingenuous reader. Severe, however, as it appears, it is said to have been more so when it came from the hands of Bolinbroke, Atterbury, and Windham, who were its authors: but Harley had expunged the harshest and most persecuting clauses. The bill was strenuously supported by Bromley, Windham, and some others of inferior note: and most vigorously opposed by Hampden, Walpole, Stanhope, Lechmere, Sir Joseph Jekyll, and Sir Peter King: but opposition was fruitless. After warm debates, the bill was carried by two hundred and thirty-seven votes, against one hundred and twenty-six, and sent up to the lords^a.

^a In this stage of the bill, Sir Richard Steel published a letter to a member of parliament, in which he points out the impolicy, injustice, and danger of this arbitrary measure: "When we consider the putting of this law into execution, there cannot be a more pleasant image presented to the imagination than a poor schismatic schoolmistress, brought before a zealous angry squire for transgressing this act, and teaching one presbyterian, little more than an animal, in what the letter D differed from the letter B; maliciously insinuating to another schismatic, aged five years old, without licence from the ordinary, that O is round; and not contenting herself with merely showing to the said schismatics the letters of a certain book covered with horn, but instructing the said heretic to put them together, and make words of them; as appears by the affidavit of one who heard an infant schismatic say o—f, of; another, o—b, ob. Prodigious! that a church, adorned with so many excellent and learned members, supplied by two famous universities, both endowed with ample revenues, immunities, and jurisdictions, should be affronted with the offer of being reinforced with the penal laws against the combination of women and children! You might, with the same propriety, provide against schismatic nurses."

From the revolution to the accesssion of the house of Hanover, reason, justice, and moderation had more powerful advocates among the peers than in the house of commons. The lords Cowper, Whar-ton, Sunderland, Hallifax, Townsend, and Nottingham, gave the most decided opposition to the bill: and it was supported by all the powers of Bolin-broke, Abington, Anglesea, the lord Chancellor, and by the bishop of London, who said, that the dissenters made this bill necessary, by their endeavours to propagate the schism, and to draw the children of churchmen to their schools and academies. The dissenters petitioned to be heard by their counsel against the bill, but their petition was rejected. Lord Hallifax moved, that they might be allowed schools for the instruction of their own children, but it was carried against the motion, by sixty-two against forty-eight. Two clauses were, however, gained in their favour: one was, that the dissenters might be permitted to have schoolmistresses to teach their children to read; and another still more important, that this act should not extend to any person who should instruct youth in reading, writing, arithmetic, or any part of mathematical learning which relates to navigation, or any mechanical art only. The inflicting of the penalties, which was taken out of the hands of the justices of the peace, where the commons had proposed to place it, and committed to the cognizance of the superior courts, gave some additional alleviation of the evil. On the third reading, an exemption from the penalties of the bill was proposed and obtained, for every person employed by any nobleman, or noblewomen, to teach in their families, provided he did, in every respect, qualify himself

according to the act, except only in that of taking a licence from the bishop. The bill was made to extend to Ireland. So powerful was the opposition, that it was carried by seventy-seven votes only against seventy-two. Twenty-six temporal peers, and five bishops entered their protest against it as the only possible remaining mark of their dislike. The

The dukes of Somerset, Bolton, Grafton, Devonshire, Schomberg, and Argyle; the marquis of Dorchester, the earls of Whar-ton, Sunderland, Dorset, Carlisle, Oxford, Derby, Lincoln, Nottingham, Radnor, and Torrington; the lords viscounts Townshend and Longueville; the lords Sommers, Hallifax, Cowper, Rockingham, Haversham, Cornwallis and Foley; and the bishops of Ely, Bangor, St. Asaph, Landaff, and Lincoln.

The protest was in these terms:

I. We cannot apprehend (as the bill recites) that great danger may ensue from the dissenters to the church and state.

Because, 1, by law no dissenter is capable of any station which can be supposed to render him dangerous.

2. And since the several sects of dissenters differ from each other as much as they do from the established church, they can never form of themselves a national church; nor have they any temptation to set up any one sect among them; for in that case, all that the other sects can expect is only a toleration, which they already enjoy by the indulgence of the state; and therefore it is their interest to support the established church against any other sect that would attempt to destroy it.

II. If, nevertheless, the dissenters were dangerous, severity is not so proper and effectual a method to reduce them to the church as a charitable indulgence, as is manifest by experience; there having been more dissenters reconciled to the church since the act of toleration, than in all the time since the act of uniformity, to the time of the said act of toleration: and there is scarce one considerable family in England in communion with the dissenters. Severity may make them hypocrites, but not converts.

III. If severity could be supposed ever to be of use, yet this is not a proper time for it, while we are threatened with much greater dangers to our church and nation, against which the protestant dissenters have joined, and are still willing to join, with us in our

commons agreed to the amendments of the lords. On the twenty-fifth day of June it received the royal

defence; and therefore we should not drive them from us by enforcing the laws against them, in a manner which, of all others, must most sensibly grieve them, viz. the education of their children; which reduces them to a necessity either of breeding them in a way they do not approve, or of leaving them without instruction.

IV. This must be the more grievous to the dissenters, because it was little expected from the members of the established church after so favourable an indulgence as the act of toleration, and the repeated declarations and professions from the throne, and former parliaments, against all persecution, which is the peculiar badge of the Roman church, which avows and practises this doctrine: and yet this has not been retaliated even upon the papists; for all the laws made against them have been the effects and just punishment of treason, from time to time committed against the state. But it is not pretended that this bill is designed as a punishment of any crime which the protestant dissenters have been guilty of against the civil government; or that they are disaffected to the protestant succession, as by law established: for in this their zeal is very conspicuous.

V. In all the instances of making laws, or of a rigid execution of the laws against dissenters, it is very remarkable that the design was to weaken the church, and to drive them into one common interest with the papists, and to join them in measures tending to the destruction of it. This was the method suggested by popish councils, to prepare them for the two successive declarations in the time of king Charles the second, and the following one issued out by king James the second, to ruin all our civil and religious rights. And we cannot think that the arts and contrivances of the papists to subvert our church are proper means to preserve it, especially at a time when we are in more danger of popery than ever, by the designs of the pretender, supported by the mighty power of the French king, who is engaged to extirpate our religion, and by great numbers in this kingdom who are professedly in his interests.

VI. But if the dissenters should not be provoked by this severity to concur in the destruction of their country, and the protestant religion, yet we may justly fear they may be driven, by this bill, from England, to the great prejudice of our manufactures; for as we

assent by commission : its operation was to commence on the first day of August'.

It will be difficult in the annals of the British legislature to specify a law more exceptionable than this, or which did less honour to the heads and hearts of the men, by whose influence it came to have a place in our statute-book. In the conflicts of party, success in such a measure may be considered as a triumph ; but it remains as an indelible stain on the names of men who might otherwise be entitled to the esteem of posterity. Want of integrity, and the sacrifice of every noble and generous principle, in order to gain some crooked, party end, strips off the

gained them by the persecution abroad, so we may lose them by the like proceedings at home.

Lastly. The miseries we apprehend here are greatly enhanced by extending the bill to Ireland, where the consequences of it may be fatal : for since the number of papists in that kingdom far exceeds the protestants of all denominations together ; and that the dissenters are to be treated as enemies, or at least as persons dangerous to that church and state who have always, in all times, joined and still would join, with the members of that church against the common enemies of their religion : and since the army there is very much reduced, the protestants, thus unnecessarily divided, seem to us to be exposed to the danger of another massacre ; and the protestant religion in danger of being extirpated.

And we may further fear that the Scots in Britain, whose national church is presbyterian, will not so heartily and zealously join with us in our defence when they see those of the same nation, same blood, and same religion, so hardly treated by us.

And this will be still more grievous to the protestant dissenters in Ireland, because whilst the popish priests are registered, and so indulged by law, as that they exercise their religion without molestation ; the dissenters are so far from enjoying the like toleration, that the laws by this bill are enforced against them. Tindal, vol. XXV. p. 205—9.

* Tindal, p. 193—209.

courtier's robes of state, and shews him naked in the Ethiopian's skin.

The dissenters had, from the revolution, been enjoying the toleration with a grateful heart, and a peaceable deportment. They were neither intriguing against the government, nor giving it any opposition: In such circumstances to bring forward and enact a law for their destruction, discovered neither great statesmen, nor men of liberal minds. There was something in the measure inexpressibly odious and severe. To deprive parents of the right of educating their own children, and of the power of committing them to the tuition of persons of their own principles and persuasion, would have dishonoured a Hildebrand, and been not out of character in the successor of St. Dominic. To forbid ministers to teach any other catechism than that in the common prayer book, which is extremely defective and imperfect, and unspeakably inferior to the catechisms of all the other protestant churches; and to render the teaching of any other, however excellent, such a breach of the act, as exposed the person to its heavy penalties, and utterly disqualified him for the future exercise of his office, betrayed a littleness of mind, which would have been better suited to a monastery of Carthusian friars, than the two venerable bodies of the lords and commons of Great Britain. To deprive at once, of their support, a considerable number of persons who had dedicated their time and talents to the instruction of youth, and reduce them and their families to certain beggary without a cause, unveiled hearts callous and insensible to the sufferings of their fellow citizens. To discourage learning at a time when perhaps two millions of the people were

unable to read ; to frame such a law, after a promise had been given by both houses of parliament, and the queen, that the act of toleration should continue inviolable ; and to do all this at the instigation, and under the influence of an unprincipled infidel, who hated Christianity in every form, presents a picture as unfavourable to the intelligence, the virtue, the public spirit, the political sagacity, and the liberality of that age, as their enemies could possibly wish^t.

If from surveying the deeds of the rulers of our country, we lift our eyes to a higher tribunal, before which they must stand, and where not only the principles, but the consequences of their conduct will be imputed to them, is there not reason to fear that when weighed in the balance of impartial justice, they will be found wanting ; and that the unhappy men will have “ judgment without mercy, who shewed no mercy.”

While the ministry thus shewed their enmity to the dissenters, death stood their friend. On the first of August, the day on which the operation of the bill was to commence, queen Anne gave up the Ghost^u,

^t Were the maxims of government, under the influence of which the English ministry appears to have acted during the four last years of the reign of queen Anne, common among the nations, we should be constrained to acknowledge, that there is more truth than we were willing to suppose in satan's boasting words, when he offered to the Redeemer of mankind universal dominion on earth. “ And the devil taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, all this power will I give thee, and the glory of them : for that is delivered unto me : and to whomsoever I will give it.” Luke iv. 5, 6.

^u The death of the queen is supposed to have been hastened by

and resigned her crown to a family the successive monarchs of which have now, for near a century, uniformly displayed themselves the friends of toleration, and of religious liberty. In consequence of this, the bill was never carried into effect. Bolinbroke was sent to do penance for his crimes in France^x, and Harley in the tower.

the quarrels of her ministers in her presence. It was with difficulty that she and her ladies in waiting could keep Harley (now earl of Oxford), and Bolinbroke, from the most outrageous behaviour. The agitation of mind which this produced, and a consultation to fill Harley's place, by the jealousy of party, and disagreement in opinion, protracted till two o'clock in the morning, had such an effect on her delicate frame as to increase the disease which in a short time ended in her dissolution, on the morning of Sunday, the first of August, in the year one thousand seven hundred and fourteen, in the fifty-first year of her age, and thirteenth of her reign.

* After quitting the pretender's service, and party in France, when he saw their affairs to be desperate, Bolinbroke supplicated permission to return to England. Leave was granted on the humiliating condition of having no seat in the house of peers, and of not intermeddling in public affairs. He accepted the terms, returned to his native country, and lived for a considerable number of years. At his death, the public curiosity was raised to the highest pitch, in hopes of speedily being gratified with the perusal of some most marvellous writings of his against the Christian religion, which were to be published, after he had sneaked out of the world. The timid friends of the Gospel were alarmed; and its enemies were all on tiptoe to see this mighty engine which was to beat down the walls of the Christian church, and rase them to the very foundation, when lo! *parturiunt montes, nascitur ridiculus mus*. The whole was mere *crambe recocta*, a repetition of the old stale objections which infidels had, for centuries before, been urging against our holy religion without effect.

SECTION III.

THE SPIRIT OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AMONG THE
DISSENTERS, DURING THIS PERIOD.

THE state of religious liberty among the dissenters, during this period, has been described in the preceding sections. The act of toleration may be considered as one of those extensive leaps, which liberty sometimes takes in its progress to increase the happiness of mankind. Had historians carefully and accurately marked the appearance of each general principle as it rose into existence, its adoption by a portion of the human race, and when it was first put into a state of beneficial operation, they would have laid posterity under the highest obligations. To some much praise is due in this respect; and perhaps the rigid laws which the literary world has imposed on the writers of civil history, have prevented many from indulging in disquisitions of this nature. The ecclesiastical historian has a claim to greater licence; and some of the pages of his volume he may, with propriety, employ in investigating the origin and progress of principles to which we are indebted for much of our dignity as citizens, and our felicity as men. Of the importance of the great principle of religious liberty its enemies appear to have been aware, as well as its friends. The attempts which were made by the occasional-conformity and schism bill to lessen its salutary

influence, or entirely to defeat its purpose, too plainly discover their dread of its power.

There is another subject of inquiry closely connected with this, namely, what ideas as to religious liberty, were, during this period, entertained by the dissenters themselves, and what progress they had made in this salutary science. The greater part of the non-conformists bore the name of Presbyterians, and of that denomination a considerable majority did then consist. As presbyterianism is a system which will admit of being established, it is in this respect on a level with episcopacy; and it resembles it too in having nothing in its nature, which necessarily leads its votaries to be greater advocates for the rights of conscience. Though the hand of presbytery has been neither so big, nor so hard, as that of episcopacy, it has laid on its blows with as great willingness, and with all its force. Of the intolerance of the Scotch presbyterians, their history is full. The English presbyterians, in the days of their power, have no praise due to them for liberality of sentiment, or for shewing equal regard to the rights of other men's consciences as of their own. But it is probable that the sufferings which they were afterwards called to endure, softened them down to greater measures of consideration and forbearance. Whatever desire any of this body might display before the restoration, to establish an effective presbyterian government, none was discovered after the revolution.

As the old generation were, at no great distance of time after this last event, gathered to their fathers, their successors discovered no symptoms of wishing to act upon the presbyterian system, and retained the name only, and not the thing. Their principles be-

came far more tolerant and liberal. The preceding age had produced nothing which can in this respect be compared for just ideas on religious liberty in its fullest extent, to Dr. Calamy's introduction to the second volume of his defence of moderate non-conformity^y. Yet he was looked upon to be as strenuous a presbyterian as any of his time : and those of his standing, may be justly regarded as holding the same sentiments with him. How different are the sentiments of Calamy from those of Edwards, the violent presbyterian in the days of the long parliament. During the succeeding years of persecution the Gospel engaged their chief attention, and supported them under their suffering. When the revolution brought with it the enjoyment of quietness, and freedom from oppression, the minds of the dissenters naturally took a wider range, and surveyed their distinguishing sentiments respecting church government. The consequence was, that in the course of this period there was a gradual, yet a considerable enlargement of mind among the ministers and members of this denomination, as to their ideas of religious liberty.

When the system of theological and ecclesiastical opinions, which men have adopted, does not necessarily contain the principles of persecution, and they have no bias in their hearts from worldly interest, there is a probability that they will be open to conviction; and if it be their happiness to enjoy intercourse with enlightened and candid men, or to be directed to the reading of authors distinguished for

^y When Mr Locke had read it, he sent word to the doctor by a friend, that while he kept to these principles, and defended the dissenters on that ground, he might defy the assaults of all their enemies.

their liberality and justness of thought, the result is likely to be a visible improvement in accurate ideas, and generous sentiments. When temporal emoluments, and pure principles are at variance with each other, persons not destitute of knowledge and capacity, or of the means of improvement, may continue for centuries without any perceptible advances towards truth: and there is besides, the *esprit de corps*, which conspires with the others to hold men fast in chains, and confines them all their days in the dungeon of prejudice and error. Others in the mean time, though not superior in talents or literature, by being emancipated from these weighty shackles, are making progress in the acquisition of these sentiments and principles which improve the human intellect and heart, and ameliorate the moral and political state of society. In a course of time the others, whose proper province it was to take the lead in so noble an office, are slowly, because reluctantly dragged after them, and almost in spite of themselves are compelled to relinquish one prejudice and false principle after another. For the instruction of mankind two or three are left behind, for a century or more, and exhibit to the wondering world the antiquated ideas, and lordly claims, of the age of darkness and superstition².

That principle of the Independents which renders the renovation of the heart, or, in other words, the possession of real religion necessary to a person's being a member of the church by a participation of all the ordinances of the Gospel, has a natural tendency to preserve them from a spirit of intolerance and per-

² Daubeny's Claims of the Church. Pearson's Duty of Steadfastness in Church Communion.

secution ; as none can have a share in the regulation of their ecclesiastical concerns, but such as profess to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and follow Christ. The system is likewise unfit for being moulded into a national establishment ; and cannot admit the great ones of the earth into their communion, in a body or at their will : they have, therefore, on this point few, or none, of those temptations to which both episcopacy and presbytery are so much exposed. It may not unreasonably be expected, that among Christians who had embraced this system, the justest ideas of religious liberty will be found : for it is a maxim nearly of universal concurrence, that where there is not on the mind the bias of worldly interest, which often generates and always fosters prejudice, the truth will be perceived with greater clearness, and in greater purity. This advantage the independents peculiarly enjoyed ; and though, at first, some of them had not attained these principles in all their extent, they were in possession of the leading ideas. The next generation improved on these discoveries, and were led forward to the view of the remoter consequences which their fathers did not so fully perceive. The enjoyment of religious liberty, in consequence of the revolution, communicated, along with other benefits, a better temper, and enabled the dissenters to examine their principles with a calmer mind, and with kinder dispositions towards men of every denomination. In such a state of mind persons are enabled to think more correctly, and to judge with greater precision : the result was beneficial to themselves and to the world. The folly and wickedness of intolerance stared them in the face, and they more deeply felt that the rights of conscience

ought to be inviolably sacred, and that all, without exception, should enjoy the liberty of worshipping God, in the way which appeared in their eyes most agreeable to divine institution.

The Baptists, with the exception of the rite from which they derive their name being confined to adults, in every thing adopted or espoused the distinguishing sentiments and modes of the independents. They had not been behind them in the days of suffering; and during the quiet of this period kept pace fully with their brethren in the reception of every general principle, and in their zeal for the doctrine of religious liberty. As they had all the advantages for free and unbiassed inquiry which the independents enjoyed, they made equal improvements, and by the exhibition of the same liberal ideas rendered a benefit to their country and to mankind.

To the Quakers all must look with respect for the justness of their ideas in every thing relative to religious liberty, and the rights of conscience. They were not the first to bring forth the doctrine before the world; but from their very origin their sentiments on this subject were perfectly correct. And what sheds a lustre of glory over them, they have been universally maintained, and invariably acted upon by them in every country, not excepting those in which they have possessed the greatest influence, and the governing power.

On the whole, this period may be considered as highly favourable to the spirit of religious liberty. Though opposition was made, and more was probably intended, yet good principles were more firmly laid in the hearts of dissenters, and took deeper root: and where the minds of men improve, and the light of truth

shines on them with brighter and more fervid beams, though events may be inauspicious and gloomy, the cause of human happiness is gaining ground, and extending its benign influence in the world.

It is to the praise of dissenters in the first period of their legal existence, that while they asserted this important principle, they do not appear to have been guilty of that mournful abuse to which human nature is so prone, in what may be called the distinguishing tenet of the sect: they did not make an idol of it. To this crime, the propensity of the votaries of every religious denomination is but too strong; and the records of ecclesiastical history contain manifest proofs both of its efficacy and extent. As one star differs from another star in glory, so one truth exceeds another in the lustre of its excellence. There is, in this respect, a gradation in the Christian system; some truths are essential to the existence of religion in the soul; others are highly important to its well-being; and there is a third class which is confessedly of inferior moment. In a well regulated mind, these truths are estimated according to their excellence, and their influence on the soul bears proportion to their relative value. But how apt are men to lose sight of this beautiful order, to exalt monstrously in their ideas, the distinguishing dogma of their party, to give it a disproportionate place in their esteem, and an undue authority over the heart and life. If a man were seen walking with his head on the ground, while his feet were dangling in the air, it would be said, "every thing is out of place: feet are necessary and useful; but it is to walk on the ground, not to impose that office on the head, and assume its place." Such is the unseemly posture of the soul when some inferior

truth usurps the highest seat, and pushes down the essential principles of the Gospel to a lower form. Episcopalians, presbyterians, independents, baptists, quakers, and methodists, have all need to lay this subject seriously to heart; and the consideration of it may be productive of great and lasting benefit to all.

CHAP. III.

REASONS OF DISSENT.

SECTION I.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES ON WHICH DISSENT IS FOUNDED.

THE sacred Scriptures recommend union among Christians, with the energy and pathos of divine authority : and while the church remains in its purity, separation from it is a heinous crime. But whatever men touch they defile ; and the whole stream of history discovers a tendency to corruption in the best institutions. This takes its rise from the depravity of human nature, which mistakes, or dislikes, what God has ordained ; and lops off what is displeasing, or adds what appears beautiful and venerable. From this propensity flowed the system of superstition and temporal domination which ended in the abyss of popery.

The reformation arrested this progress of evil. It however did not take for a model the apostolical church, as delineated in the New Testament ; but in this country satisfied itself with removing those things, in doctrine and worship, which appeared abominable, and wore evident marks of the impurity of the whore of Babylon. The tendency to lose what has been

gained, and to sink back into corruption in one form or another, shewed itself speedily in the English church. The tolerant and liberal temper which wished to render every thing as light as possible upon the conscience, soon died away ; and the stern spirit of demanding unqualified compliance on every point arose in its stead. In the mean time, light increased : questions were agitated which sharpened men's minds, and led to the discovery and evidence of many important truths, which had not before engaged the attention of the learned and religious world. These, as they were discovered and believed, formed a part of the mental system, and produced trains of reasoning, modes of sentiment, and rules of conduct unknown before. The body of the clergy, in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty, were widely different from their predecessors in office in the year one thousand five hundred and sixty, and far more enlightened on a variety of the most important subjects. Let not this be considered as a reflection on the reformers. It is only saying that the world did not stand still, that the impulse which they gave it continued to act ; that so beneficial was the effect of their discourses, and their writings, that men's eyes were opened to see the truth in a clearer light ; and that they were afterwards enabled to follow up the discovery of other valuable truths by means of the clue which the reformers had put into their hands.

In consequence of these advantages, pious and enlightened men learned to examine matters with a more penetrating judgment and nicer discrimination. Their virtue and goodness kept pace with their improvements in knowledge. Little to the honour of the English character at the æra of the reformation, the

mass of the clergy changed backwards and forwards, shifted with the wind, and moved with the tide. From their original popery, they became half protestants under Henry the eighth, whole protestants under Edward the sixth, papists again under Mary, and protestants again under Elizabeth. These four changes in their faith, and five professions in their sentiments, took place in the space of eight and twenty years. Where there was such versatility, there could be little principle and little piety. There were a few good men, the rest were time-serving vicars of Bray. But, in a century after, England could boast of a far more enlightened and virtuous clergy, the principles of thousands of whom would not bend with external circumstances, and the changing decrees enacted by the authority of the state. Their conduct would be according to conviction, but they must be first convinced. The act of uniformity required them to do what they conceived to be contrary to the honour of the glorious Head of the church, and hostile to the purity and integrity of his institutions. In consequence of this, they made a stand, separated themselves from the establishment, and formed those dissenting societies which remain to the present day.

It has frequently been the subject of acute discussion how far men should yield for the sake of peace, and what principles they ought to sacrifice, in order to preserve the unity of the church. The situation in which the persons are placed, will have a considerable influence on their judgment, though, in many instances, they may be insensible of its power. If they belong to the dominant sect, it is natural for them to speak in the strongest terms in favour of union and peace. What they have done themselves,

they will certainly wish others to do. Natural disposition will likewise have considerable effect in such a controversy. Men of timid minds, and of soft and yielding hearts will be inclined to give up much for the sake of avoiding separation. On the other hand, persons who are unconnected with a hierarchy, who are under no restraint of interest, nor feel the force of the *esprit de corps*, will view things in a different light, and act according to their views. Truth will appear to them of more consequence than peace; and if they cannot have both, they will embrace truth with their whole heart, and, though with reluctance, bid her desirable companion adieu. They will be joined by another class. Men of firm and vigorous minds, who unite with their intellectual qualities stern intrepid virtue, will be unmoved by situation; and regardless of their external circumstances, and the losses which they may sustain, will follow the decision of judgment, and the dictates of conscience with an unwavering soul. A third class will, in such circumstances, be formed of persons who, though rather deficient in strength of nerves, and decision of character in ordinary life, are eminent for the power of religion, and delicacy of conscience; and would not, for the gain of the whole world, comply with a measure which gives offence to God, and defiles their souls with guilt.

That people may differ about trifles is too frequently seen; and when they break off from the communion of a church on account of these, their conduct is highly reprehensible. But there is an extreme on the opposite side. When men yield, for the sake of peace, to impositions against which conscience revolts, and which conscience condemns as

hear what they have to say in their own behalf, what they can alledge in favour of the sentiments which they espouse, what are the principles for which they contend, and what are the faults of the English church on account of which they separated from her communion.

Let a dissenter, as he professes to be the follower of these men, and to adopt their ideas, step forth and declare his principles, and every candid man in England, of every denomination, will hear without prejudice. He may employ as much energy as he pleases. Animation, earnestness, and strong colouring will be allowed him. But let him use no scurrility, no low abuse, no bitter sarcasms, no unjust accusations. A dissenter accepts the offer; he hopes to be found guilty of none of these faults; he begs to be permitted to express himself with frankness, and the confidence of truth; and he will stand up and speak, while churchmen and others, who choose to form a part of his audience, sit and hear. As he conceives the subject of high importance, he desires to speak as in the sight of God, and wishes all who are present to consider that the eye of God looks into their heart, to examine its reasoning, and to observe its decisions.

The fundamental principle on which I build the whole of my system is, "That Jesus Christ is the sole head of the church." A legislative authority in it belongs to him alone. This authority he has exercised by framing a divine constitution in every respect perfect and complete. To this, in all its parts, I feel myself indispensibly bound to adhere. Whatever he has revealed, that I am called on to receive. What-

ever he commands, that I am obliged to obey. Whatever he forbids, it is my duty to avoid. Whatever he has left indifferent, that no man, or body of men, has a right to enjoin, or to forbid: for who should make either a duty or a sin of what Christ has made neither the one nor the other. If any man, or body of men, make additions to Christ's constitution, fidelity to him constrains me to reject them, as a criminal encroachment on the sovereign authority of the great Head of the church. Or if they take away, or leave out a part of Christ's constitution, and do not enjoin the whole, from the same principle I am under the necessity of refusing to embrace their system; because they impeach the wisdom of the divine Legislator, as if in his constitution there was something superfluous; and assume an authority in his kingdom to which they have not the shadow of a claim.

To these sentiments, and a corresponding conduct, I feel myself bound by the general spirit of the New Testament, as well as by particular injunctions. "Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ." Matt. xxiii. 8, 9, 10. Christians have a right to all the doctrines and institutions of the Gospel, just as they were communicated to the world by Jesus Christ: and in order to the enjoyment of them, none should render necessary any thing more than Christ has made necessary. As the church is the kingdom of the Redeemer, in which he is the sole Legislator, and all the clergy, and indeed all men who profess to be his disciples, are but his servants, entrusted with not a grain of

legislative authority, but only of ministerial power, it is little less than high treason, nay it is more than high treason, to make the laws of Christ of none effect by their canons, and exclude from the benefit of his institutions those whom he commands them to receive. Can it possibly be imagined, that He, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, would give authority, either to civil or ecclesiastical governors, to undo what he has done, or contradict what his wisdom has enjoined.

A second principle, which is a main pillar of my religious system, is, "that the sacred Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice." The words of Chillingworth to this effect, which have been always quoted with approbation, "the Bible, the Bible alone is the religion of protestants," I can apply to my sentiments with the greatest propriety. The Bible, the Bible alone is the religion of protestant dissenters. All my religion is contained in this book. Whatever I find in it, I receive with reverence, as a revelation from God: and I receive it without an objection to a single idea. It is the voice of God, and I feel it my duty to listen and obey. On the other hand I receive nothing as religion which is not contained in this book, by whomsoever it may be maintained, and however great the names which it may boast of as its advocates. If Eusebius were to bring me the creed agreed on in the council of Nice, and say, "subscribe your name to the truth." I would answer, this is your creed, but you are fallible men; I will examine it, and see if it accords with the word of God. "But we are the fathers of the church, to whom the profoundest reverence should be express-

ed." For historical facts I give you that credit which your character seems to demand, but not for doctrines: fathers are not always wiser than their children. The piety of many of you I revere: your furious, passionate behaviour towards each other I detest: your skill in interpreting Scripture I never admired. But I will examine your creed by the word of God: only be assured, that the authority of your synod weighs nothing with me.

If cardinal Bellarmine should put into my hands the decrees of the council of Trent, and say, "receive these, and believe them, for they have the seal of infallibility upon them: they were framed by a general council, and confirmed by his holiness the pope." My answer is, I will examine them, to see if they agree with the word of God. "Examine them! I say receive them, and believe them: if you refuse, you will incur the dreadful anathema both of the pope and the general council, whose authority you have the arrogance to question. If you hesitate I will instantly denounce it against you." You may do so if you please: I am not afraid of *brutum fulmen*: the curse causeless shall not come. Could I find your infallibility sanctioned by the word of God, I would respect it. But I cannot, and I must try every thing by the sacred Scriptures. Adieu, cardinal Bellarmine.

Should archbishop Parker deign to reach me the articles of the church of England, and have the courtesy to add, "these were drawn up by the most eminent reformers, some of whom gave their lives for the truth. It is the queen's (Elizabeth) command that you, as well as every other subject of her realm, should receive them, on pain of her displeasure.

They have been also ratified in convocation." May it please your grace, I highly respect the reformers: I revere their virtues, and would throw the veil of charity over their faults; but I must examine their doctrine, whether it be according to the Scriptures of truth. I must, according to divine command, try the spirits whether they be of God. "It is the queen's injunction, man, that you should declare your unfeigned assent and consent to the whole." With all due reverence for her majesty, as my civil ruler, I must be plain to say, that as I do not believe the infallibility of popes and councils in matters of religion, neither do I believe the infallibility of queens and convocations. I must examine for myself. Whatever in the articles is agreeable to the book of God, in receiving it I receive them: and whatever is contrary, I must reject. "Consider what you do: the consequences are serious. You know I have ejected a great number of ministers from their livings because they refused subscription, and would not yield a full conformity: many of them are entirely ruined; and some are in prison. It was the queen's wish." I know you have: I am no stranger to your character and proceedings; but whatever may be the consequences, I must obey God rather than man.

If the prelate should be followed by a presbyter who should thus address me, "I am Mr. Herle, prolocutor of the assembly of divines which met at Westminster. This is our confession of faith, confirmed by proofs from the word of God, you are requested to subscribe it." The most I can say, sir, is, that I will examine if it accords with the sacred oracles. "Why will you not put your name to it? It has been approved by the ablest divines, and subscribed

by all the ministers and elders of the church of Scotland, which is said to excel every other church in purity. Pray do." I assure you, sir, I have a very high esteem for many of the members of the assembly. With the exception of the synod of Dort, I do not know that there was ever a council of Christian ministers, who, for talents, piety, and zeal, could be compared to them either in ancient or modern times. But they were fallible men, and I must try their sentiments by the sacred Scriptures. But stop, I have just cast my eye on the twenty-third chapter, where it is asserted, that "the civil magistrate has authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure, and entire, that all blasphemies, and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administred, and observed. For the better effecting thereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them, be according to the mind of God." The only proof from the New Testament of this prodigious authority, is Matth. ii. 4, 5. And when Herod had gathered all the chief priests and Scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born; and they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written in the prophets." So you call this proving a doctrine from Scripture, Mr. Herle? Take back your confession of faith, I will not put my hand to it.

Should I, after this, have the honour of a visit from Dr. Owen and Mr. Howe, and they should bring with them the system of the congregational brethren

agreed on at the Savoy, and say, "this is the substance of divine truth, which we have drawn from the Word of God, after much prayer and patient attention to the subject," I would reply, gentlemen, I am greatly honoured by your visit. From my heart I can truly affirm, that there are not two men in England, or the world, whom I more highly esteem, to whom I am under greater obligations for the benefit I have reaped from their writings, or to whose judgment I would pay greater deference. But I can receive nothing on your authority, I must examine your confession of faith by the oracles of truth. "You mistake our meaning (they reply), we are not come to desire you to subscribe it as your creed. It was not designed to be imposed on any one, but to be laid before the world as an exposition of the sentiments which we hold. Examine it by all means: embrace what appears agreeable to the divine will, and if any thing be contrary to the form of sound words, reject it. Gentlemen, farewell."

Let none imagine from what I have said on this subject, that I treat human authority with contempt: far from it. If a wise and good man assert any thing to be a divine truth, I hear with attention, and give it the weight which is due to so respectable a character. If twenty good men assert the thing, I listen to it with still greater respect. If two hundred of equal wisdom and goodness unite in the assertion, I consider myself bound to weigh it with still greater deference. If it be a subject in which their worldly interest is not concerned, nor the prejudices of education interwoven, the person, who would treat such authority with contempt, merits the severest reprehension. But still I consider them as fallible men; and it is my duty to

compare their sentiments with the Old and New Testament, and to receive them just as far as they agree with the writings of Peter, and Paul, and John, and the other apostles of Jesus Christ, "these holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Another important principle, which belongs to my system, is, "the right of private judgment in all matters of religion." Personal conviction lies at the foundation of all rational devotion, and Christian practice. If a system of opinions be presented to my exception as of divine authority, I must require to know the evidence on which it rests. If it be satisfactory to my mind, I embrace it, and I feel my obligations to act under its influence. But if it does not carry conviction to my mind, I must reject it, for it does not prove itself divine. To whomsoever it may be a rule, it cannot be a rule to me. Should any find fault with this reasoning, I beg leave to ask, if I am not to judge for myself, who is to judge for me? "The priest," will it be said. If a thing appears to me to be false, am I to receive it because he says it is true? But what priest? "Your parish priest, to be sure, who is your lawful teacher." If he has such a right as being my parish priest, then the curé of St. Sulpice in Paris has the same right as parish priest over his numerous parishioners. Then the parish priest at Toledo, the iman of a mosque at Constantinople, a bramin at Benares—"No, no, no, for shame." But where is the weak link in the chain? If I am to submit to the parish priest because he is my legal pastor and teacher, appointed by authority to guide me in matters of faith, there is precisely the same reason for the

submission of the parishioners of St. Sulpice, of Toledo, of Constantinople, and of Benares. "You mistake: none of these people out of England hold the truth. Will you compare paganism, mahometanism, or even popish superstition to the pure truth as it is taught in this happy land?" Who is to judge if what is taught be truth, the priest or the parishioners? If the priest, then his judgment is to decide as priest and legal teacher of religion: and by the same authority do the other priests decide. Every argument therefore in favour of a clergyman in England, will plead with equal force in favour of a priest in France or Spain, and of the mahometan iman, and the pagan bramin; for every one of them believes that he is in possession of the truth. If this reasoning be not satisfactory, the only alternative is, that each parishioner shall judge for himself; and then the whole fabric falls in ruins to the ground; and fall it must, for it is built upon the sand, or rather it is a castle in the air.

It may be said, perhaps "the supreme magistrate and the legislature are to judge for you: it is their prerogative." This shocks me more than the other. The studies and pursuits of the rulers of the nations have seldom been peculiarly directed to theology, and a critical investigation of the doctrines of religion; and on this account, they are certainly not likely to be very competent judges in spiritual casuistry. If a mans conscience is not to be in the priest's keeping, it appears still more unsuitable that it should be in the king's keeping. If it be asserted, that it is one of the prerogatives of his office, then it must belong to every ruler in every land. The French emperor and his legislative body have a right to guide the con-

sciences of all the inhabitants of France. The same authority appertains to the king of Spain and his courtiers; to the grand seignior, and his divan; and to the emperor of China, and his mandarines of state. The reader must not be alarmed nor indignant at the comparison; for however much these men may differ from each other, they agree in this, that every one of these rulers conceives his religion to be true, and every one has equal authority to enforce or propagate his religion. On this statement of the subject, it is presumed, that few will be found to maintain the argument.

But there is something to be adduced, which is still more decisive against the claim, namely, the authority of sacred Scripture. Nero reigned at Rome, when Paul preached the Gospel, and was a prisoner there. But did he give up his religious opinions to Nero's judgment, or the judgment of the senate? No; he maintained them in direct opposition to both, and suffered death for disobedience to the emperor's edicts, and because he would not acknowledge his authority in matters of religion. Or does he give the slightest hint that others should bow in submission to the ruler's faith? No: where he enjoins obedience to magistrates in civil affairs, religion is evidently, an excepted thing; and the disciples of Christ are commanded to yield subjection to him alone, and to suffer the loss of goods, of liberty, nay, and of life itself, rather than submit to be of the established religion of the Roman empire. These, it may be said, were not Christian magistrates. But in what part of the sacred code, will it be found that Christian magistrates have this peculiar privilege conferred on them? Should it, for the sake of argument, be

allowed that it belongs to Christian magistrates, then it is the prerogative of the king of Spain. But if I dwelt in Spain, am I to receive my creed from him? Am I, at his command, to swallow the dregs of popery? No. "It is the magistrate who professes the reformed religion in its purity to whom this authority belongs." But if the magistrate is himself to be judge (and judge in this case he must undoubtedly be), the king of Spain glories in being a member of the holy apostolical Roman catholic church; and he considers the king of England as a heretic, whose soul is defiled with the most dangerous opinions, and whose condemnation is certain. If they are both to be judges in their respective countries, each thinks his own faith the best, and there is no end to the labyrinth. The only remaining alternative is, that every individual should judge for himself in matters of religion; and as he must give an account of himself unto God at last, so he must use his understanding to choose his religion, and decide for himself in a matter of the highest moment to his eternal felicity. Thus will every thing fall into its natural channel. The business of the priest or minister is to teach the principles of religion, that the people may understand them, and be enabled to judge aright: and the office of the magistrate is to protect them in the enjoyment and exercise of religious liberty, while they demean themselves as peaceable members of the community.

I wish it always to be remembered, that the Gospel was designed for the poor as well as the rich: and that it is so framed by infinite wisdom, as to fit the understandings of the mass of mankind; and that every serious and humble enquirer will perceive such

evidence as to convince him that it is divine, and lead him, with the Scriptures in his hand, to the reception of all necessary truths.

Another principle connected with this, which is also one of the pillars of my system, is, "that every man has a right to make a public profession of that religion which his private judgment dictates to be from God." To maintain that I may hold what sentiments on religion I please, but that I must not profess them openly, is trifling with sacred things. Religion involves in its very nature the exercise of public worship. Its most delightful ordinances are to be dispensed in society; and some of its sweetest pleasures are enjoyed in the communion of the church. If I be deprived of these, it is but mockery to say, that I have the right of private judgment. I plead likewise for liberty of a public profession; and I think that every argument, which proves it to be the right of every individual to judge for himself in matters of religion, establishes his right to profess it in open day. Should a person say to me, "you have convinced me, that you possess a right to have a tree growing in your garden; but remember though this tree will be allowed to bud, it shall neither blossom, nor put out leaves, nor bring forth fruit; you have no right to that, let it keep its blossoms, and leaves, and fruit within itself, and you shall not be molested." To such a speech a laugh would be accounted a better answer than an argument. In opposition to such an advocate, enough has been said to establish the right of the individual to display the leaves, and flowers, and fruit of his inward sentiments, or, in other words, to draw them out into their natural effects and consequences in an

attendance on public worship, and the observance of the social institutions of the Gospel.

When the Lord Jesus Christ sent out his apostles to propagate his religion, their commission ran in these words, "go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Mark xvi. 25. In this commission, it is plainly implied, as will be evident to all, that the apostles had a right to go into every country, and to preach in every country; and that if the ruler of any country impeded them in their Master's work, and refused to allow them to assemble the people to hear the Gospel, he was, by such act, setting himself up in direct opposition to Jesus Christ. Or if any one of the sovereigns of the nations had said to an apostle "you may enjoy your own opinions without molestation, but you shall not preach them to the people in my dominions," would he not have been guilty of a most heinous crime, for which he must give an account at the last day to him who is the king of the kings of the earth?" If it was a crime in them to hinder the apostles from preaching, it was a crime also to hinder the people from hearing them. And if when the apostles went away, they left an evangelist, a Timothy, or an ordinary minister, an Archippus, to carry on the glorious work, it was a crime in the eyes of Christ to prevent either him, or the people from assembling together for the worship of God, and for observing the ordinances of Jesus Christ. But if I preach the doctrine of the apostles, or hear that doctrine preached by another, is it not equally criminal in any ruler to prevent me from doing so?

If a society of pious people, members of the church of England were to have their residence at Madrid,

they would naturally wish to meet together for the public worship of God. If, after a time, an edict were to come forth from the king of Spain forbidding them to meet again, would it not be an act of glaring injustice, for which it will not be easy to give an account to the great Sovereign of the Christian church? But when any other government deprives its peaceable subjects of the pleasure and advantages of social worship, is not their conduct equally unjust? Should it be pleaded, that such an assembly is forbidden by the laws, what is this but to say that the laws are unrighteous, directly in the teeth of justice, and that the legislators have, with daring impiety, set themselves against the Lord, and against his anointed?

“But will not the safety of the state be endangered by the exercise of such unbounded liberty?” What but disorder and civil commotion can be expected as the natural consequence of extensive indulgence? Religious animosities will soon set the country in a flame.” Though this objection is commonly urged, it certainly does not come from the lips of a man who is intimately acquainted with the annals of the nations, and at the same time possesses a candid and liberal mind. He must be either grossly ignorant, or deeply prejudiced. The severest evils which any country has suffered on an ecclesiastical account, have arisen from disturbances created by the clergy of the established religion, when they were displeased with the conduct of the civil rulers^a. The greatest injuries next to these, have had their origin in the discontents of untolerated sects, groaning under the envenomed scourge of persecution and oppression. Where full liberty of worship was given, no

^a See Jortin's Remarks on Ecclesiastical History, *passim*.

injury has been sustained: but a refusal to grant it has brought the heaviest calamities on the land.

The history of our own country is fully sufficient, from the number and kind of the examples which it furnishes to us, to enable a person to make up his mind on this important subject in favour of religious liberty. England has felt a convulsion connected with dissensions about religion. But was it when granting a free toleration to all; or when refusing it to every one who would not subscribe to the established creed? The stern intolerance of the reign of Charles the first, was (though not the chief, for that was civil oppression) one cause of the miseries both of England and Scotland. At present, while under the benign government of George the third, there is universal toleration, can any country enjoy greater internal peace; and do not all feel an equal interest and concern for its welfare? However much they may differ on theological points, all agree in this. Were they all of one communion, their harmony could not be more complete. America presents us with a similar example of this pleasing kind. There are no restraints on religious liberty; but every man may publicly profess his faith without suffering the slightest civil disability on that account. The government finds no trouble from their theological strife.

But ought not the magistrate to be acquainted with the opinions of a person, or sect, before liberty of worship be granted, as they may prove injurious to the peace and welfare of the community. This precaution has been often suggested, and much alarm has been roused concerning the danger of tolerating religious opinions. But governments appear to have been guided by their prejudices, and to have felt a

causeless dread of every system which was different from their own. For near two centuries England refused to tolerate Roman catholics, because their tenets were hostile to England's peace. In France the government professed that the protestant religion was dangerous to the state. Scotland was, for a season, unwilling to tolerate episcopalians, as inimical to the established presbyterian faith. And England for a considerable time would not allow liberty of worship to the presbyterians, because they were said to be enemies both to church and state. With such examples in view, little regard is due to the pretended fears. Were inquiry to be made concerning every preacher's faith in England, a board of various-members and subdivisions would be necessary for the purpose. And if there was such a board, they might think that by allowing one, refusing another, warning a third, and giving sage counsel to a fourth, they did wonders, and prevented a world of evil and danger to the state: and but for their precautions, the country would be undone. But how useless they would be, to say nothing worse, the quiet spirit of the people of these congregations sufficiently declares. Among such a variety of sects, the grossest absurdities may be supposed to be held by some individual preachers, and opinions which are calculated to do no good at least, to society. But the effect is counteracted by the operation of more powerful causes: and their opinions are in themselves far more harmless than ten thousand conversations which take place in taverns every week, and their congregations are better off than the millions who frequent no place of public worship at all. It would be difficult to alter things in this respect for the better. Religious liberty is

enjoyed: the government does not officiously pry into the people's religious sentiments: and the active vigilance of the magistrate punishes every offence against the laws of the land, the powerful guardians of public morals and public peace.

The church is that body of which Christ is the head. The view of it, as presented in the sacred Scriptures, furnishes another part of the foundation on which I build my system of dissent. It is the declaration of the Saviour, "my kingdom is not of this world." The design of its existence is not to impart to men riches or honours, or earthly pleasures. It is not to convey worldly dominion, or to invest its members with any kind of temporal power. The Redeemer's purpose is to make the subjects of his kingdom wise unto salvation. The various institutions are intended to instruct mankind in the principles of the Gospel; to form them to holy dispositions and virtuous conduct; to lead them to the performance of every duty to God, their neighbours and themselves; to introduce them to communion with God, and the consolations of religion; and to prepare them for a state of eternal blessedness in heaven.

These are the great objects which the different ordinances of the Christian church were appointed to accomplish. The reading of the Scriptures, the preaching of the word, prayer, praise, baptism, and the Lord's supper are the moral instruments of the Mediator for the establishment of his dominion, and have no connexion with the world, no interference with temporal authority, but are all simple institutions of a spiritual nature, the tendency of which is to illuminate the minds of men with the knowledge of divine things,

to purify the heart, and communicate spiritual delight.

The members of the church are persons who, professing to believe the Gospel, and to regulate their life by its dictates, unite in the observance of Christ's institutions for their spiritual improvement, the honour of God, and the benefit of others. Such is the definition given of their character in the nineteenth article of the church of England. "The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance."

In the epistles to Timothy, and Titus, the gifts and graces, the acquirements and qualifications of the ministers of the church of Christ are amply described. In civil affairs, they have no concern: and in virtue of their office they have no temporal dominion, no power over men's bodies or estates. They are introduced into their vocation in the church by the voluntary choice of its members: their mutual approbation and consent form that relation which takes place between them, and lay the foundation for those duties which they owe to each other. Some relations in life arise out of our very existence; such is that of parents to children, and children to parents. There are others which spring from choice and compact: those of husband and wife, of master and servant are of this kind. To the latter class, belongs the relation between a minister and his flock.

The pastors of the church being thus invested with their office, their whole business is to attend to the spiritual edification of their people; to endeavour, by the dispensation of the ordinances of the Gospel, to promote their improvement in knowledge, in faith,

in love, in holiness, in humility, in consolation, and thus render them meet for the fruition of eternal blessedness. In every thing they are to act not as lords over God's heritage, but as ensamples of the flock. As the design of the office is not only to edify believers, but also to convert impenitent sinners, and to bring them out of the world into the church, this is not to be done by temporal inducements, nor by force, but by the influence of divine truth on the heart; "for it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." All the ministers weapons are of a spiritual kind.

If any member of the church act contrary to the rules of the Gospel, after intreaties, warnings, and reproofs employed without effect, he is to be excommunicated, that is, separated from the church, and disowned as a member. By this exclusion, he is deprived of the peculiar privileges of a member of the society; but it takes away from him none of his wealth, or temporal advantages; and it robs him of none of his civil privileges.

All the affairs of the church are to be managed by spiritual men. None but Christians are qualified; and those only I call Christians who "deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ." Should I hear that a Yorkshire ploughman, who understands no language but his county brogue, was appointed professor of Arabic in the university of Cambridge, or that a blind man was chosen by the manufacturers of Leeds to judge of the goodness of the colour of their cloths, it would appear to me unspeakably less absurd, than for mere worldly men, destitute of the knowledge or of the spirit of the Gospel, to bear any office in the church of Christ, or possess any autho-

rity in the management of its concerns. Whatever their outward stations and conditions in civil society may be, they are more unfit to have any influence, or exercise any power over its ministers and members, or to interfere in the regulation of its affairs.

These, gentlemen, are the principles on which my system rests. It will give me pleasure if you will weigh them with an attentive and a serious mind. I earnestly wish you to examine every part of the foundation on which I rear my structure of dissent, and to try if it be deficient in any quarter. If you please, we will meet again to-morrow. I will then proceed to state my objections to the church of England, and my reasons for being a dissenter from her communion.

SECTION II.

PARTICULAR REASONS OF DISSENT.

I AM happy, gentlemen, to see you again : I consider it as a proof that my reasoning has not given you offence. “ We have reflected, sir, with some attention, on what you said to us yesterday ; and we desire you to proceed to specify your particular reasons for being a dissenter from our church.”

As I acknowledge no head of the church but Jesus Christ, I cannot accord with the church of England, which owns the king for her head. Indeed, when the matter is carefully examined, it will be found, that the king, in conjunction with the parliament, is her creator, preserver, reformer, and every thing : and that in him alone she lives, and moves, and has her being. The church of England, in nearly her present state, was brought into existence by the creative energy of the legislative authorities of England. The knights and burgesses in the commons house of parliament ; the temporal peers, dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons in the house of lords ; and queen Elizabeth, the sovereign of the land, brought the church of England into being, like Adam, full grown, with all her soul and body ; but she had also her garments, her gifts, and her ornaments. They were mere laymen, and a laywoman, who were the authors of her existence. As for the spiritual peers, they refused to concur, and absented

themselves on the occasion, having an earnest desire for the establishment of popery^b.

As the civil government is the creator, so is it likewise the preserver of the church of England. No one dare touch a hair of her, or fashion it in a different way without its authority and permission. If any alteration takes place, it is not by the power of the clergy, but by the power of the parliament and the king. If a single occasional and temporary collect be wanted on a fast or thanksgiving-day, for the use of the parish priests, the college of archbishops and bishops have not a right to make it without an order from the king. The impotence of both houses of convocation, when formerly allowed to meet, and to act, was such that they could not even censure with effect the erroneous opinions of a member of their own body. A woman, who then sat on the throne, was of a different opinion from all

^b A small book, entitled, "The Touchstone of the new Religion, &c. or sixty Assertions of Protestants tried by their own rule of Scripture alone, and condemned by clear and express texts of their own Bible: to which is added, a Roman Catholic's Reasons why he cannot conform to the Protestant Religion. London, printed in the year one thousand seven hundred and thirty-five," and purchased in Ireland in the year one thousand eight hundred and seven, where it is no doubt extensively circulated among the Roman Catholics, assigns this as an eighth reason why they cannot conform to the protestant religion: "because protestancy was settled upon its present bottom in this kingdom by act of parliament, in the first year of queen Elizabeth, in opposition to all the bishops, to the whole convocation of the clergy, and to both the universities; that is, in one word, in opposition to the whole body of the clergy of the kingdom; as may be seen in Dr. Fuller, book vi. &c. and Heylin, page 285—6. How then can it be called the church of England, or any other church at all, seeing it was introduced and established only by the authority of mere laymen, in opposition to the church," page 49.

the clergy of the land, and her opinion prevailed. They thought Whiston a heretic: good queen Anne, of blessed memory, was of a different judgment; and Whiston remained unrebuked^c.—Pray gentlemen do not frown.

The alteration of any thing which may be considered as a standing rule, requires still more of the civil authority: there must be the concurrence of the lords and commons, as well as the approbation of the king or queen. Various alterations have been made of late in the frame of the church, respecting the residence of the clergy, the power of the bishops, and the appointment of curates. But by whom have they been made? By the clergy in convocation? No such thing: but by his majesty, and the lords and commons in parliament assembled. By them all is done. They are the sole reformers; and without their permission and authority the clergy cannot wear a garment of a different shape or colour in their ministrations. So truly indeed is the civil authority the head of the church, that her thousands of clergy, dignified and subordinate, cannot alter a single question in the catechism, nor wear a blue surplice instead of a white one, were they so inclined. Here then is a parliamentary church as to its origin, a church wholly made by laymen, and alterable by laymen according to their sovereign's pleasure. It has been attempted to represent the church as the ally of the state; but it is not so. The state is the head; the church but one of the inferior members. The church of England is the creature of the state as much as the army, the navy, the courts of justice, or the

^c Burnet's History of his own Times, vol. II. p. 571, 2, 3.

boards of customs and excise. She is as much in its power as any of them ; and it can alter, amend, and regulate every thing belonging to the church just as it does in respect to all the others, and has her as much under its dominion and controul.

To such a church I do not choose to belong : I will have no head nor lord in spiritual matters but Jesus Christ. I will cheerfully entrust king, lords, and commons with all my civil concerns, but not with my soul. Here I beg leave to judge for myself. In saying so, I am guilty of no offence against the government of my country. When all the inhabitants of England were enjoined by parliament to live in the communion of the established church, it was a parliamentary duty only. But when the legislature says to me, " if you do not like the church, you may go to the meeting," I am hereby absolved from parliamentary sin, and in their eyes stand *rectus in curia*, perfectly innocent of the crime of treating them with the slightest disrespect.

I object to the claim in *toto* which is made in the twentieth article, " that the church hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority, in matters of faith." The constitution which Christ has formed, is either complete, or it is not. If it is complete, there is no need of any addition : if it is not complete, let them speak out and say so. Has the church of England a right to make any thing, which is, in its own nature, indifferent, and which Christ has left indifferent, to be not indifferent, but binding on the conscience of her members, and the privilege of communion at her altars, to depend on their compliance with that rite. I beg she would have

the goodness to produce her commission for the exercise of such authority. If there be things which, though of themselves of little importance, yet, from being long abused to purposes of false doctrine and superstition, have appeared to many wise and good men calculated to mislead, and to ensnare, it will be inconceivably difficult for any church to prove that it has a right to enjoin these ceremonies on its ministers and congregations. From the exercise of such a power by the church of England, during the four-score years succeeding the accession of queen Elizabeth to the throne, hundreds of the most excellent ministers were ejected from her communion, and prevented from the exercise of their ministry, and buried in private life, or driven into foreign lands. Such were the bitter fruits of the churches' power to decree rites and ceremonies*.

If the church of England possesses this authority, so does every other church. Her parliamentary origin can give her no peculiar claim to the privilege: it must be in virtue of her being a church. But if this be the ground, can she deny the claims of the church of Rome, which boasts of a more ancient and spiritual descent. If the church of England has a right to enjoin the wearing of surplices and gowns, as she formerly did also hoods, tippets, and many things

* A great part of the bishops' office, during these three reigns, appears to have been to hunt out of the church those ministers who could not conform to every ceremony. Scores of worthy men were suspended in many dioceses on this account; and at a time when the country was overrun with ignorance, hundreds of zealous preachers were forbidden to speak to the people in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that they might be saved. One of them applied to a nobleman for his influence with the bishop in his behalf, and received the following answer: "had you been guilty of

more as necessary ; so has the church of Rome to appoint all the fantastic wardrobe of her arch-episcopal cathedrals. If the church of England has a right to consecrate earth, and stones, and bricks, and timber ; the church of Rome has as good a right to make holy water, holy oil, holy knives. If the church of England has a right to decree that the sign of the cross shall be used in the baptism of every child ; has not the church of Rome as good a right to order that the priest shall put his fingers into its ears, as a sign that it shall listen to the word of truth ; and salt upon its tongue, as a sign that its conversation shall be always with grace ; and to administer milk and honey, in token that it shall love the sincere milk of the word, and keep God's commandments, which shall be sweeter to it than honey from the honeycomb. " But, sir, the church of England decrees nothing which is forbidden in the sacred Scriptures." Well, and who will say that there is any express prohibition of these rites and ceremonies of the church of Rome ? My principle is, that every thing should be left indifferent, which Christ has left indifferent : and I will not belong to a church which acts so uncharitably as to make those things necessary for our communion, which Christ has not made necessary for communion in his church.

As to the church's " authority in matters of faith," wherein doth it consist, and how far does it extend ? If she has authority to decide what is the true doctrine of Scripture, whom do her decisions bind ? The

drunkenness, or grosser immoralities, I could have procured you relief ; but if you cannot comply with the ceremonies you are undone. It is a crime in the eyes of the bishop, for which there is no forgiveness."

clergy alone, or the laity too? If the priests are certainly bound, are the laity to have no right of private judgment? However things may appear to their minds, are they to believe only just as the church believes? If they have a right to judge for themselves, all this vaunted authority is nothing. If they have not the right, they may belong to that church who please—I will not.

I ask too, what church has this authority? Can the church of England shew any particular grant from Jesus Christ? If she possesses it merely as being a church, then the church of Scotland must possess it too; but her decisions are different from her elder sister's in the south. The Lutheran church of Sweden must possess it, and her decisions are different from both. The Greek church prefers her claim, and she differs from all the three. The church of Rome too, never backward in pretensions, insists on having the same right, nay, in having the sole right; and pleads in support of her authority in matters of faith what none of the others have ventured to do, namely, her infallibility. Thus arrayed, she condemns and curses all the rest as wicked usurpers and impious heretics, whose perdition is sure. In what a labyrinth are you now involved! Did Christ give authority to any men, or bodies of men, to decree as to the doctrines of Scripture in different, nay, in opposite ways? Will you withdraw your claim? If you are determined to retain it, I shall only add, that it was an unhappy oversight in those who composed the articles, not first, by means of some spiritual Diomed, to have stolen the palladium of infallibility from the shrine of St. Peter's at Rome.

I must likewise profess that I am dissatisfied with the multiplicity of offices and dignities among the clergy of the church of England. In the New Testament I read of bishops or presbyters, and deacons, as the only standing ministers in the church of Christ : and their character is delineated for the instruction of the faithful in every age. Persons holding these offices should be found in every Christian society, meeting together for the various acts of worship ; for that is the idea of a church in the apostolical writings : and we find that they actually were in every church for some hundred years after the commencement of the Christian æra. But in the church of England, I see archbishops, deans, archdeacons, prebends, canons, chancellors, in addition to the stated ministers of a parish ; and the bishops extending their authority over hundreds of churches. This multitude of names and titles does not savour of the simplicity of the Gospel.

If it was the design of the laymen who planned the English church, as it is said to have been of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, to form an ecclesiastical constitution, the dignities of which should bear an analogy to those of the state, and whose ministers should appear with splendor among the most exalted ranks of civil society, their efforts have certainly been crowned with complete success. But I derive my system of religion entirely from the Word of God ; and I do not perceive that the institutions of Christ breathe the wisdom of this world, or accord with its spirit. If these various offices be necessary, it is strange that Christ never hinted any thing concerning them. If they be not necessary, it must be an exhibition of groundless pomp, and an

useless waste of funds: and in Christ's spiritual kingdom there should be nothing for mere show—every thing must be for use.

As those offices are all of mere human invention, as a friend of the purity and simplicity of the Gospel, I cannot approve them. If men have a right to make additions in one thing in the church of Christ, they have in others; and there will be no end of them, as is evident from the monstrous fabric of the church of Rome. Christian antiquity, for three hundred years after the Redeemer's advent, knew nothing of such offices and such designations. How odd would a list of these various names appear to a converted pagan. He had heard a humble missionary, who called himself a minister of Christ, and he believed the truth as it is in Jesus. He had read the sacred Scriptures. He had observed the simple constitution of the New Testament church, and he naturally supposed this to be its form in every country in Christendom. But when he meets with this long list of names, to him of sound uncouth, he is filled with astonishment. He could hardly think that it belongs to the household of faith; and would be ready to exclaim with one, spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles, to the seven sons of Sceva the Jew, "Peter I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye."

Another objection which I have to your church is, that I do not think a liturgy, or constant stated form of prayer to be so much for the edification of the people, or so agreeable to the nature and spirit of the New Testament, as extemporary prayer. That a form of prayer is lawful and may be expedient and profitable for those persons who are destitute of the

gifts of prayer, will not be commonly denied. But that it is the best and most instructive method, either in public or private worship, and ought to be in general use, requires both more and stronger arguments than have yet been adduced in its defence. Allowing a liturgy to be perfect, yet, if it be constantly used, the daily or weekly repetition of the same words has a tendency to produce inattention: custom leads people to read and hear without ideas being affixed to the words; and affections corresponding with the truth are not excited nor felt. Such is the constitution of the mind, that the best human composition, when with a continued frequency it recurs to the ears, and to the eyes, loses its effect, it ceases to interest, and becomes flat and tiresome.^f There is need of the seraphic ardour of a saint in heaven, nay, of Gabriel's fire, to maintain a spirit of lively devotion in the daily and weekly repetition of the same things.

You may sometimes hear a sermon which charms you by its superior sense, sound theology, exalted piety, and persuasive eloquence; but if it were proposed to you to hear this every Sunday, would you not reject the offer and say, "No, if it were ten times better than it is, nay, if it were inspiration itself, I should not wish to hear it every day, or every

^f It is only in this way to be accounted for, that some very pious and excellent clergymen read the service of the church in so cold and slovenly a manner, and with so little of apparent devotion. When one of this class is heard in the pulpit proclaiming salvation by a crucified Redeemer, the ardour, the earnestness, and the affection which he displays, form such a contrast to his exercise in the desk, that the congregation is ready to think that the soul of some worldly brother stole the use of his body there, or that a new spirit entered into him when he ascended the pulpit.

Lord's-day, for I am sure it would lose its effect. The church of England varies every week the chapters to be read from the sacred volume, which would bear to be repeated at least as often as the prayers, which she has decreed to be sounded in my ears as often as I enter her hallowed walls. I admire the wisdom and goodness of God in giving to his code of revelation such extent and variety, that although I read it every day I vary my devotion, exercise, and study through the whole year.

If the person who officiates in worship possess an edifying gift in prayer, his extemporary addresses will much more engage the attention, and draw forth the affections of the worshippers. The ideas and words conceived at the moment he will generally express with much more energy and pathos, and with greater effect upon the congregation, than the clergyman who reads a form which he has read a thousand times before. In all prescribed forms, the person who officiates must bring his heart to the printed prayer, and have the frame of his soul regulated, and called into exercise, by the words of his book. This is by no means calculated to have such influence, either upon the speaker, or the hearer, as when the topics of prayer arise out of the feelings of the preacher's soul, and the words and petitions flow from the fulness of his heart. The pre-eminence of extemporary prayer, in accommodating that part of worship to peculiar and extraordinary circumstances, must be acknowledged by every candid reasoner. And of how much benefit this is for direction and consolation, the children of sorrow and distress especially can tell*.

* When any remarkable event, either in the way of mercy or judgment, takes place respecting the nation, in every congregation

As to the capacity of performing it with propriety, and to edification, it may confidently be affirmed, that the man who has talents for preaching the Gospel with acceptance, has talents also, if they be properly exercised, for extemporary prayer. If a person be found unable to express himself in prayer in an edifying manner without book, there is reason to fear that he is destitute of that "aptness to teach" which is mentioned among others as one of the qualifications necessary in a minister of the Gospel. Forms of prayer cannot be discovered in the Christian church till more than three hundred years after the Saviour's advent. But during all that time which is said to have been the æra of the church's greatest purity, how did her ministers perform the devotional part of public worship. They must all have been able to pray without book, and yet to pray to the edification of the people, and with supplications as efficacious as any which have been offered since.

Is not the great Head of the church as able to bestow gifts on his ministers to lead the devotions of his people now as he was then? In fact, it will be found, that he does bestow them; and that this part of worship is conducted decently, and in order, and

where extemporary prayer is used, immediate notice is taken of it, and suitable confessions, supplications, and thanksgiving are offered up, while the hearts, both of the preacher and the hearers, are warm with the subject. But those assemblies which worship by a stated form must wait till the king issues his command for the bishops to meet and frame a collect for the purpose. By that time the subject has, in a great measure, lost its interest, and the minds of the people are cooled. The form of prayer for each fast-day, when it is cried for sale about the streets by the ballad-merchants, sounds strangely to dissenting ears, telling all the world, before-hand, what they intend to say to God on a certain day to come.

in such a manner as eminently to conduce to the spiritual improvement of the congregation. And many have acquired such a measure of holy eloquence as to rouse the affections of the Christian people to a more elevated strain of devotion ; and to produce more powerful effects on the soul than any stated form will be found to do. Even where ministers are defective in the gift of preaching, their talents for prayer are very often such as to excite the wonder of others that they perform this part of their office with so much propriety. As to exceptions, which may justly be brought against persons who are really deficient in ability, their number will be found to bear no proportion to such as read the liturgy in a slovenly and irreverent way ; and that the evil effects produced by their improprieties on their congregations, which are usually of the poorer sort are not to be compared with the injury done by the careless, indifferent, irreverent, and indevout manner in which the service of the church is read by by a ten times greater number of the clergy.

I have expressed my disapprobation of all stated forms of prayer ; but if any prefer that mode of worship it is highly proper that they should enjoy it ; for every man should be left to his own choice, and follow the dictates of his own judgment in matters of religion. But apart from the general question of the expediency of forms, I have many objections to the liturgy of the church of England. That it was compiled out of various popish rituals, which were then in use in different parts of the kingdom, is ascertained from unquestionable records^b. One disadvantage of considerable magnitude arising hence

^b Burnet's History of the Reformation.

is, that it does not form a homogeneous and perfect whole. It is cut into an endless number of bits and shreds. The collects and offices, which are so numerous, mar the due order and connexion, and prevent the worshippers from entering particularly into adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving, which ought peculiarly to characterize a liturgy. Some things are mentioned again and again: other things of equal importance not at all.

The repetitions are numberless. When the litany is read, the Lord's prayer is repeated four times in the course of the service in the desk, and once in the pulpit. Surely this cannot be for edification. In other parts, the same petitions occur several times. In short, it may be safely affirmed, that though the prayers of dissenters are usually charged with the fault of irksome repetition, there is no place of worship in England in which extemporary prayer is used, though the minister should have the poorest abilities, where there are so many repetitions as in the morning service of the church of England. Extend the remark to all the protestant places of worship of every kind, from the Land's end to the Tweed, and it will be found that there are a hundred times more repetitions in prayer within the established church than without it: and we know who has said, "when ye pray, use not vain repetitions."

The reading of the Apocrypha in the public service I likewise exceedingly disapprove. That there are many things false in its history, erroneous in its doctrine, and ridiculous in its narrations, nothing would be more easy than to demonstrate. Who will deny that Tobit and his dog, Tobias and the angel, and

Bell and the dragon, are fitter to amuse children in a chimney-corner in a winter's evening, than to be read in the solemn worship of a church of Christ. The very highest part of it is merely human wisdom: yet from these books, to the exclusion of the canonical Scriptures, the divines who framed the liturgy have prescribed above a hundred lessons in the course of the year. The homilies in one place call the Apocrypha the word of God; but the articles contradict them, and say that it is only the word of man.

Nor am I pleased with the mode of reading the psalms, by dividing the verses alternately between the clergyman and the congregation. What rational apology can be offered for such a practice, it is difficult to divine. His verse is easily understood: but the people's is a confused mumbling of sounds, not calculated for edification. There may be no statute nor canon in its favour: but it is an universal custom: if the matter, however, be calmly considered there certainly can be nothing but custom pleaded in its defence. Perhaps in the whole history of the Christian church, both in ancient and modern times, the practice of alternate reading is no where to be found but in the church of England¹.

The preference of an old translation of the Psalms, not from the original Hebrew, but from the Septuagint, and different from that which is in the English Bible, may be justly complained of on account of its imperfections. The liturgic version of the psalms is a translation from a translation: and the Greek transla-

¹ The odd appearance which it makes, and the ludicrous ideas excited in the mind by this alternate reading, will be seen by looking at Psalm l. 16. &c. and cii. 4. &c. and considering the clergyman as repeating one verse, and the people another.

tion, from which that English one is taken, has so many faults, that it is strange to think, that a learned church as that established in England is, if she will not receive into her rubric the Psalms from our common Bible, should not go to the fountain, the Hebrew Scriptures, and translate them into English at once. In one place the old and new translation flatly contradict each other. The old version in the psalter says (Ps. cv. 28.), "And they were not obedient to his word." The new one in our Bibles makes the sense to be, "and they rebelled not against his word." As the clergy have solemnly professed their unfeigned assent and consent to every thing in the Book of Common Prayer, and have likewise declared their assent to the Scriptures, as in the common translation, how do they reconcile these things to each other, and to themselves?

To the length of the morning service I have a serious objection, as I consider it to be injurious to the edification of the people. The preaching of the Gospel should have a sufficient portion of time reserved for it in the public service. Recollect what is said on the subject in the gospels and epistles of the New Testament; and you must be convinced that the preaching of the Gospel was an essential part of the ministry of Christ, and his apostles; and if the ignorance of a great part of every congregation be considered, and how much the rest need to have divine truth brought anew to their remembrance, the necessity of preaching will evidently appear. But the tediousness of the morning service has almost exhausted the strength of the preacher, and the attention of the hearers, before the sermon begins. It may be in consequence of this, that it frequently

lasts not above ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes. This is all the instruction from the living teacher which numerous congregations receive. But what science will a man learn by twenty minutes teaching in a week? To the stated inconvenience of so tedious a service I should not choose to submit. I prefer a public service where preaching occupies a larger part of the time than it does in thousands of the churches in England.

I object to the creeds which the church of England has adopted into her liturgy, and uses in her worship. The article in the apostle's creed, that "Christ descended into hell," is interpreted by bishop Pearson according to the letter of the words; but bishop Burnet conceived it to mean that the soul of the Redeemer was in heaven during the period between his death and resurrection. If this exposition be allowed, it is the doctrine commonly received in the protestant churches. The Nicene creed speculates on the Trinity, and gives a human explanation, which multitudes, who receive the Scripture doctrine of the Trinity will not admit. Christ is there called "God of God, light of light, very God of very God." But what idea do these words of man's device convey? That they are consistent with the Son's equality with the Father, will be with many a matter of doubt.

In the Athanasian creed, there is a still more subtle and metaphysical representation of the Trinity; and a variety of human definitions and distinctions, far beyond the simplicity of the sacred Scriptures in its declaration of the doctrine. After the manner of the age in which this creed was composed, there are anathemas guarding it in the van, and in the rear, and

fired from their spiritual artillery against all who do not believe every iota which it contains: they are excluded from heaven, they are shut up in hell.

There was a schism between the Greek and Latin church respecting the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son. The Latin church asserted that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This the Greek church would not allow, but maintained that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and receives of the Son. Both were in an error, for they apply to the nature or essence of the Holy Spirit, words which evidently relate to the execution of his office in the economy of redemption. The Athanasian creed takes the Latin side of the question, and in this it is supported by the Nicene, and both condemn the doctrine of the Greek church. But the Athanasian more fierce than his fellows, casts all members of that communion into the bottomless pit, and shuts them up for ever. When the sacred Spirit in the Scriptures proclaims aloud, "go preach the Gospel: he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be condemned," I bow with reverence and faith to the word of God; but when I hear a man repeat a multitude of the most metaphysical distinctions, and human additions, and add his furious anathema against those who will not receive every word which comes out of his mouth, I am filled with horror.

There is something more, respecting these creeds, which is exceedingly awkward. It is asserted in the Nicene creed, that the Son is of the same hypostasis, or substance, with the Father. The Athanasian contradicts the assertion, and in its bolder strain affirms that there is one hypostasis of the Father, and another

hypostasis of the Son. The difference of translation apparently removes the difficulty ; but still it is odd. It has been remarked by some, that when the clergyman, who, in the morning has been reading the Athanasian creed so free in its anathemas, in the afternoon repeats the burial service which sends all to heaven, there does not seem a consistency between the two, nor do they accord with the word of God.

I object in the strongest manner to the sentiments held by the church of England, and expressed in a succession of offices which I cannot but consider as contrary to the doctrine and spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The error begins with baptism. By the clergyman who dispenses it the following expressions of praise are uttered from the liturgy : " Then shall the priest say," " We yield thee humble thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy church." Can an enlightened and conscientious minister really pronounce these words in faith ? Surely it is not from the New Testament that the doctrine of regeneration in baptism, and its universal efficacy for this purpose has been derived. The reformers must have forgotten to erase this part of the collect in those popish rituals, from which the English liturgy was compiled. The sentiment is calculated to produce on the minds of the people effects not according with the spiritual nature of the Gospel, but savouring strongly of the efficacy of the *opus operatum* of the church of Rome. The notion of regeneration by baptism is likewise contained in

the catechism. In the answer to the second question the child is taught to say, "In my baptism I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." The dangerous error is thus instilled into the whole of the rising generation in the established church.

Confirmation succeeds baptism. It is an ordinance of human origin, and is destitute of all authority from the word of God. What resemblance can be found between Peter and John's conveying the Holy Ghost by the imposition of hands on the converts in Samaria, and a modern bishop's confirming the young people of his diocese? But at the worst, "what harm (it may be said) can the blessing of a venerable prelate, accompanied with the laying on of his hands, do to the youth of his flock?" What harm? The injury may be incalculable: it may ruin the soul. When it is supposed, nay, and expressly said, that a mighty, a divine virtue accompanies the rite, evils of the most serious nature may arise out of the errors which it engenders. Attend to the doctrine of the rubric on the subject. In one collect the bishop says, "Almighty and everlasting God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by water, and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins: strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost, the comforter; and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace." In another there is this petition, "We make our humble supplications unto Thee for these thy servants, upon whom (after the example of thy holy apostles) we have now laid our hands to certify them (by this sign) of thy favour and gracious goodness towards

them. Let thy fatherly hand, we beseech thee, ever be over them, let thy Holy Spirit ever be with them."

But what foundation is there for such an immense superstructure to rest upon? It is announced, "that none shall be confirmed but such as can say the creed, the Lord's prayer, and the ten commandments; and can also answer to such other questions as in the short catechism are contained." But does this afford a sufficient ground for such a declaration, and such eucharistical addresses to God? The knowledge required is exceedingly scanty: and a person may be able to repeat the creed, and Lord's prayer, and commandments, and catechism, who has not a single idea in the mind corresponding with the words. The declaration of their purpose to endeavour to observe these things may be the impression of the moment, or a thing of course according to what they have been taught to say. How solemn, and how weighty are the bishop's words! and uttered in prayer and thanksgiving to God! The credit which will naturally be given to them, is it not calculated to produce a mistake of the most dangerous kind? Is there not the greatest reason to fear, that it will lead them to conceive themselves to be the children of God when they really belong to a very different family? Consequences of eternal duration may result from the act.

The service for the visitation of the sick, presents a continuation of the same dangerous doctrine. When a person feels the hand of God lying with weight upon him, and sees death staring him in the face, he will tremble and weep, and say, and do every thing that he is bid, if he be told by a clergyman that it will conduce to his deliverance from the miseries of a

future state, and to the attainment of eternal happiness in heaven. How little dependence is to be placed on such tears, and penitence, and professions, the conduct of the generality of those who recover but too clearly demonstrates. Yet when this declaration is made by the person in affliction, the clergyman pronounces a most solemn absolution, in the following words. "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: and by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, amen." What effect, think you, gentlemen, is likely to result from this? Is it not more than probable, that the afflicted person will feel a confidence in the safety of his soul, and please himself with the assurance of eternal blessedness, when he would be far more properly employed in offering up the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." This is so serious a subject, and the doctrine of the church so exceedingly dangerous, that I tremble at the thoughts of the numberless souls which it may have ruined for ever.

The burial service forms the fourth link of this perilous chain, and binds up all the people of England in the bundle of life. To speak of the state of departed souls, requires the lips of wisdom and caution. There is such a proneness in human nature to delusion, and such a disposition to hope when there is no just cause of hope, that a wise and good man will be extremely careful not to raise groundless expectations, as they tend greatly to injure the living, and convey false ideas of the spiritual world to their minds.

Most of all should this caution be observed in an ordinance of religion. As the hearts of the relatives of the deceased and the spectators are softened by the sight of death, and impressible in an extraordinary degree; and the words of a clergyman arrayed in the priestly vestments, and pronounced with awful solemnity, will at such a season sink into the very centre of the soul, the greatest care should be taken that nothing may be said concerning the state of a wicked man which would give any ground to suppose "that it shall be well with him."

But so far is this from being the case, in this service of the established church, that in the order for the burial of the dead, while the mourners surround the grave, the clergyman is enjoined solemnly to declare, "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, of his great mercy, to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother now departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ." And in another collect there is something to the same purpose, but of greater strength:—"Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity; we give thee hearty thanks for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world, beseeching thee that it may please thee shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect." Still farther to foster the confidence of all present in the safe and happy state of the deceased, the priest, in the concluding prayer, is taught to speak thus:—"O

merciful God, &c. who hath also taught us by his holy apostle saint Paul, not to be sorry as men without hope, for them that sleep in him, we meekly beseech thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our brother doth." Could words have been devised, which more plainly intimate that the person whose body is committed to the grave possessed the character of a good and faithful servant of Jesus Christ, and is entered into the joy of his Lord? But over whom is this service performed? Were it confined to those select members of the English church, who, according to the judgment of discerning Christians, denied themselves, took up their cross, and followed Christ, it might be considered as the enlightened expression of pious charity. But, alas, there is no such restriction: it must be performed over all, except those who are excommunicated, or not baptized, or have died by suicide. These are the only exceptions: over all others the service is read, and those lively hopes expressed. It is yearly read over thousands of infidels, and ten thousands of drunkards, swearers, sabbath-breakers, lewd, covetous, unjust, and persons defiled with all the vices and crimes concerning which the Spirit of God in the Scriptures says, that "they who do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God and of Christ." But the officiating priest in the church of England says otherwise: and though he weekly in the pulpit denounces the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, yet when he stands by the side of the grave, as if death were the expiation of a sinner's crimes, he expresses a full assurance of his admittance into heaven.

Must not the mourners go away consoled with the persuasion of the happy state of their departed friend, and falsely imagine, that if they live as he did, they are safe. The extent of the mischief produced by such a service is incalculable. The wrong ideas on a subject the most important, which it is calculated to diffuse through millions of minds, is an evil of the first magnitude. Alas, that God should daily hear so many untruths spoken in the most solemn manner, on the most awful occasion, by persons invested with the most sacred offices. How a pious clergyman can from day to day utter such expressions in a multitude of instances where there is no ground to entertain the smallest shadow of hope, is so strange, that I am utterly at a loss for words to express my astonishment and grief*. Every person of this character it becomes to consider seriously what he does, when he solemnly utters his hope that all the people of his parish who have died are gone to heaven, whether during life they were righteous or wicked¹.

* That this reasoning may not be supposed to be the mere effect of prejudice in a dissenter, let the words of a dignitary of the church be thrown into the balance, and have their weight. Dr. Tillotson having frankly owned in a sermon, that the dissenters had some plausible objections against the common prayer, archbishop Sancroft sent for him to reprimand him. The doctor stood to what he had asserted. The archbishop asked him what parts of the common prayer he meant. He mentioned the burial service. Upon which the archbishop owned to him, that he was so little satisfied with that office himself; that for that very reason he had never taken a cure of souls. Calamy, vol. I. 226.

¹ Besides these dangerous parts of the service, there is a supplication in the close of the first prayer at the grave, which merits reproof, either for its impenetrable obscurity, or false theology. It is in these words—"O holy and most merciful Saviour, thou worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not at our last hour, for any pains of

On the whole so unscriptural are the ideas of the church of England in these four ordinances, so erroneous the doctrines she holds, and so pernicious the effects on the multitudes who give implicit credit to every thing she says, that were there nothing else to blame, I should think every dissenting minister justified for refusing to officiate at her altars, and every dissenting layman justified in separating from her communion, and bearing testimony against what is so contrary to the word of God, so dishonourable to the simplicity and purity of the Gospel, and so conducive to the progress of impiety, infidelity, and atheism^m. In the name of ten thousand wonders, gentlemen, why are not these things altered, and the reproach of your church rolled away? How is it possible that what is so wrong could have supported its existence for more than two hundred years, while the sun of reformation was rising higher all the

death, to fall from thee." Is there any other meaning which these words can convey, but that the pains of death expose a Christian to imminent danger of apostasy. This is nowhere taught in the page of inspiration, and tends to fill the mind with gloomy horror, in direct opposition to the cheerful triumph of faith, which the sacred Scripture inculcates and inspires. It is also in direct opposition to fact, which proves that the pleasures of life, and not the pains of death endanger the soul of a disciple of Jesus.

^m Matthew Mead, an eminent non-conformist, was politely addressed by a nobleman, "I am sorry, sir, that we have not a person of your abilities with us in the established church. They would be extensively useful there." You dont, my lord, require persons of great abilities in the establishment. "Why so, sir; what do you mean?" When you christen a child, you regenerate it by the Holy Ghost. When you confirm a youth, you assure him of God's favour, and the forgiveness of his sins. When you visit a sick person, you absolve him from all his iniquities: and when you bury the dead, you send them all to heaven. Of what particular service then can great abilities be in your communion?

time?" "If you have any thing more to say, sir, go on."

I conceive it to be of much importance that the sacraments should be dispensed in their native purity, and that nothing should be added to the original institution, and nothing taken away. From this principle I object to various things respecting both these ordinances, which are contained in the rubric of the church of England.

The prohibition of parents to present their own children in baptism, I reckon a peculiar hardship, as well as an unscriptural practice. In the primitive church down to Austin's time, it is said, that when the parents were dead, other people entered into their place, and dedicated the children to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; but not a hint is given that it extended farther. By the laws of the English church god-fathers and god-mothers are necessary beings, and must assume the parent's place. If they take any vows upon them, which however from the strange form of this part of the liturgy may justly be questioned, they promise what, in general, it is impossible for them to perform, were they so disposed: authority over the children they have none; that resides wholly in the parents. For persons to promise

ⁿ The propriety of alterations in the services of the church was acknowledged by king William and his ministers, when a commission was given to thirty eminent divines for that purpose. Alterations were actually made in six hundred places by this committee, consisting of the most learned men in the church, ten of whom were bishops. After such things, it will be scarcely decent for churchmen to maintain that the liturgy is perfect. At any rate dissenters are warranted from such high authority to say, that alterations are necessary.

what it is not in their power to do is not wise, and to enjoin them to come under such an obligation is not just. It has therefore been properly considered as a blemish in the church. The affections of nature, the obligations of duty, and the possession of authority all reside in the father and mother; to them therefore belongs the privilege, and on them devolves the office of dedicating their children to God in baptism.

I likewise disapprove of accompanying the dispensation of this ordinance with the sign of the cross; and rendering it an essential part. At the best, it is but a superstitious rite of human fancy; but what is very strange, it is, by the constitution of the English church, rendered as necessary as the ordinance itself. Should a person scruple it as an unlawful thing, his child must go unbaptized; for a clergyman would act contrary to his subscriptions, and his vows, should he presume to omit it, and he would not be able to answer to his diocesan for his conduct. It is injurious too on the ground of superstition. By the same rule that the church of England invents one rite, the church of Rome may invent ten. I will engage to defend the use of chrism, salt, spittle, and the other ceremonies of christening in her ritual, by every argument by which you defend the use of the sign of the cross. "But the sign of the cross is a significant rite. It is in token that hereafter the person baptized shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banners, against the world and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." So are the Romish rites. The chrism signifies the anointing of the Holy Ghost. Salt put on

the tongue, is in token that the speech shall be with grace; and putting the finger into the ear denotes that the person shall listen to the word of truth. If once then you go beyond the divine institution, there is no limit which can oppose an effectual restraint.

I am also dissatisfied with that part of the rubric relating to the Lord's supper, which renders it necessary for every one to receive it kneeling. That the original posture was that which persons use at table in receiving food, will be acknowledged by all: nor is the posture destitute of importance, because the ordinance was designed to express the love and condescension of Christ to his disciples, and the intimacy of relation, and familiarity of friendship to which they are admitted. All this meaning, which is apparent in the original institution, where Christians sit with Christ at his table, and are entertained by him as his guests, and his friends, is lost in kneeling. This posture was of late introduction into the church of Christ, and countenanced and supported its pre-eminence by transubstantiation: the bread was the body of Christ, and they must bend the knee in token of adoration and homage. An objection to it was felt with peculiar force in the age of the reformation, by many excellent men, whose memories retained a lively sense of the dreadful excess to which it had been abused by superstition. Should it be said, "This is but a trifling matter. Why dispute about such a thing as sitting or kneeling at the Lord's table?" But the greater trifle it appears in your eyes, the more inexcusable the church of England is in insisting on it as a thing absolutely necessary, and refusing the Lord's supper to those who, from scruples of conscience, cannot receive it on their knees. If the apostle Paul

were desirous to communicate with her sons, no clergyman could consistently with the obligations he has come under, administer it to him, if instead of consenting to kneel, he chose to sit. Such rigid harshness and severity savour not of the spirit of the Gospel of Christ: they have been productive too of the most baneful effects. Hundreds of good ministers of Christ, nursed in the bosom of the established church, rather than submit to this rite, which they accounted symbolizing with popery, and countenancing pernicious superstition, suffered the loss of considerable ecclesiastical emoluments, and what was far more dear, the opportunity of preaching the Gospel and saving the souls of men, at a time when there were but few besides who were qualified for the work°. So mischievous may a small thing be, when rigidly enjoined as of indispensable necessity. Had it been left indifferent, or had it been permitted to those who scrupled kneeling to use another posture, what a multitude of evils would have been avoided? Ten thousands of souls which the stern injunction of this rite plunged into misery, by being deprived of these faithful ministers, by whose preaching they might have been eternally saved; and mountains of guilt created by the unfeeling severity of intolerant prelates, who have long ago been called to give an account of their stewardship before a higher tribunal, would have never had existence^p. So dangerous it is to violate a principle. Nor is it an inconsiderable evil to hatch the eggs of superstition, and send abroad the noxious brood, to the injury of the Christian religion. Rome is enabled to vindicate all her fantas-

° See Neal's History of the Puritans, vol. I.

^p Archbishop Parker, Whitgift, Bancroft, Laud.

tical rites in the celebration of the Lord's supper, by the example and laws of the English church. The same train of reasoning which the protestant body employs to defend its practice, will serve as an impenetrable barrier of defence to the popish hierarchy: for the same authority which sanctions the enactment of one rite, which Christ has not instituted, will sanction twenty: and Rome will come off triumphant in her contest with Canterbury. On these grounds I disapprove of the cross in baptism, and kneeling at the Lord's supper.

In addition to these blemishes, I cannot but consider the confinement of the clergyman to the words of the liturgy in the dispensation of baptism and the Lord's supper, to be exceedingly injurious to the edification and devotion of the people. What serious and fervent addresses would the ordinance of baptism draw forth from the heart of a zealous minister of Christ! In the Lord's supper the amplest scope is given for the exercise of spiritual gifts. It appears to be the very field intended for the display of holy eloquence, by which the devout affections of believers are raised to the highest pitch, and their souls filled with the most delightful consolations, and animated to a faithful performance of all the duties of the Christian life. Talents, zeal, and piety have here the noblest scope; and by the exercise of them how extensive would be the benefits diffused. But instead of this liberty, there is a rigid form, from which the officiating minister must not, and dare not depart in any instance; and in the distribution of the elements a dull repetition of the same words to every communicant at the altar. By this arrangement, so far have they been from attending to the apostolical intimation,

that "gifts are bestowed on every one to profit (the church) withal," 1 Cor. xii. 7. that the archbishops of Canterbury and York, the most learned, and the most able divines, and the most eminent doctors convey not one grain of edification more to the audience, in the dispensation of the Lord's supper, than the inexperienced youth, who was but a year ago emancipated from his college. Surely these things are not as they ought to be. Such unwise restraints can never be for the edification of the body of Christ. They are in my view so improper, that had I no other cause of offence but this, I should think myself justified in being a member of a dissenting society, in preference to living in communion with the church of England.

Discipline I consider as of high importance to the church of Christ, and therefore I must express my disapprobation of a church where there is none. That this is the case in the church of England is confirmed by the best of testimonies—her own. Every Ash Wednesday, after morning prayer, the litany ended according to the accustomed manner, the priest shall, in the reading-pew, or pulpit, say, "Brethren, in the primitive church there was a godly discipline, that, at the beginning of Lent, such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend; and instead whereof (until the said discipline may be restored again, which it is much to be wished) it is thought good that, at this time (in the presence of you all),

should be read the general sentences of God's cursing against impenitent sinners, gathered out of the twenty-seventh chapter of Deuteronomy, and other places of Scripture; and that ye should answer to every sentence, amen."

A lamentation of this nature may, perhaps, continue for a few years without offence, as from peculiar circumstances there may not be an opportunity of reform; but if it be uttered more than two hundred years as an annual complaint, people will say that it must be the language either of insincerity or impotence. If insincerity has, upwards of two centuries, had its residence in the bosom of the English church, I desire not to belong to her communion. Or if it is the effect of impotence, and the church has continued three times the life of man in Egyptian bondage, I desire to take my flight to societies of liberty and power, where there is strength to reform abuses, and exercise the godly discipline of the primitive and apostolical church.

If recourse be had to the New Testament for the description of a church, it consists of those who profess faith in Christ; and corroborate that profession by a holy life. None but those who made a credible profession of their faith in the Saviour were admitted to the communion of the faithful. When they ceased to shew their faith by their works, and relapsed into their old iniquities, they were excluded from the society of believers, and were considered and treated as heathen men and publicans.

But in the church of England what is there to be found which bears even a distant resemblance to this description? The country is divided into certain districts, called parishes. All the inhabitants of

a parish are considered as Christians. Every person in the parish, whatever his character may be, swearer, drunkard, sabbath-breaker, adulterer, or infidel, if he choose, has his children christened; and when he thinks proper, comes and kneels at the altar, and receives from the hands of the parish priest the consecrated bread and wine in the sacrament. Is not this the case generally through every county in England? But what resemblance does this bear to the communion of the faithful according to primitive usage in the peculiar ordinances of the Gospel? Does it represent the union of believers in faith and love, and their obligations and endeavours to put away from among them every wicked person? The likeness is not greater than between the frosty darkness of a winter midnight, and the radiant splendor of a summer's noon.

Excommunication, it may be said, which is a part of godly discipline, is an ordinance of the church of England. So far good. But let it be examined and seen when, how often, and on what accounts, and in what manner it is pronounced. It should be exercised in every parish, "The clergyman, sir, pronounces it when there is occasion." But has he authority to form a process and decree, or is he merely the instrument of pronouncing it? There is a chancellor's court, composed chiefly, and sometimes wholly of laymen, a tedious and expensive court, in which the cause is investigated, and the sentence decreed. But how seldom is this part of godly discipline known, though wickedness every where abounds. Unless in instances where causes not Christian induce the process, it is seldom heard of. Nor should it be matter of regret that this is the

case: for when the sentence is pronounced on a man, he is immediately stripped of his privileges as a citizen. How naturally does this remind us of a state of things mentioned in Revelation xiii. 16, 17, wherein no man was permitted to buy and sell, but such as had a mark which I shall not name. Because a man is a notorious sinner, must he therefore be deprived of his civil rights? Must he be prevented from suing for his property, or appearing as an evidence in a court of justice? Nay, if the excommunicated person do not, in forty days, profess repentance, the king's writ sends him to prison, where he is to continue till he makes a satisfaction for his offence by penance and humble submission. In such a mode of procedure there is something so truly antichristian, and so replete with the savage persecuting spirit of popery, that I am filled with indignation at the sight.—Church of England, mother of children, are these thy doings? "It is from pure love to my children that I treat them thus." Thy voice is indeed the voice of Jacob, but thy hands are the hands of Esau. Fare thee well.

If you have patience, gentlemen, to hear me proceed, there are several things relative to the entrance of the clergy into their office, to which I am compelled to object, and which appear in my eyes not agreeable to the purity and simplicity of the Gospel.

Of ordination by piece-meal I disapprove, as utterly destitute of foundation in the sacred Scripture. From the perusal of this book, without any regard to previous system in the mind, it will appear that whatever ordination may be, when it takes place, the

person is introduced to the whole ministry of the Gospel, and all the functions which it includes, without exception. But in the church of England there is a tripartite division of powers: and thrice must the bishop's hands be laid on the head of the candidate, before it receives all the virtue which they contain and impart. The first imposition makes him a deacon; and the holiest hand can do no more. By this he is qualified "to assist the priest when he ministreth the holy communion, and to help him in the distribution thereof; and to read holy Scriptures and homilies in the church; and to instruct the youth in the catechism; in the absence of the priest, to baptize infants, and to preach, if he be admitted thereto by the bishop;" and he is to attend to the state of the poor. More than these, the deacon cannot do without a second touch. But tell me, for I long to know, why a larger measure of ecclesiastical existence is necessary to dispense the ordinance of the Lord's supper than the ordinance of baptism? But after a deacon is transmuted into a priest, a certain portion of virtue still remains in the ordainer: and it is not till the third touch of the episcopal hands that the whole of the virtue is conveyed; and then having drained them dry, all priestly power is conferred, and the person being now a bishop has attained the full stature of a perfect ecclesiastical man: and besides the performance of all the functions, for which he had received authority by his previous ordinations, he has acquired ability to confirm the youth, and to ordain deacons and priests. Though it may be painful to you to hear it, I must say that I think the practice of the church in these things savours more of Romish

ceremony, and the assumption of mystic spiritual power, than of the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ. The mode of ordination among the dissenters I unspeakably prefer, as more agreeable to the spirit of the New Testament, and remote from all approaches to superstition and unfounded claims of ecclesiastical dominion.

But this is not all the fault I find with your ordination service. There is something in the "form for ordering priests," to which I have stronger objections than it is possible for me to find words to express. It has left such an impression, that whenever it occurs to my thoughts, I am pained and hurt. Whether any thing be owing to circumstances, you shall judge from my relation. Conversing with a neighbour, a very worthy man, on the subject of ordination, he asked if I had ever seen the rite practised in the church of England, I acknowledged that I was never present at the service, nor much acquainted with the subject. "There is (says he) to be an ordination of priests to-morrow at _____ by the archbishop of Canterbury—will you go with me, and judge of the solemn service for yourself." I agreed to go. The same evening one of my family was taken ill, and I was obliged to be up all night. Next morning, when my neighbour called, I told him that I was afraid I should fall asleep at the church, which I exceedingly disliked, and begged to be excused. He urged me to go, and said he would keep me awake. I went, and in the course of the service I fell into a slumber: when half awakened out of it, the following words struck my ears: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest.—Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are

forgiven : and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." My mind in that state attending only to the words of Scripture, I thought "it is Christ that is speaking—he is giving the commission to his apostles, for he never uttered such words to any other men." But I instantly recollected "that is long since past." I then said to myself, "it must be Antichrist, the man of sin, who sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God ; for what man can communicate to another the power to forgive sins." By this time I was roused, and looked around me, and saw my neighbour by my side, and the archbishop with his hand upon the head of the young man whom he was ordaining priest. He repeated the same words to a second, a third, and a fourth. Each time I felt peculiarly painful sensations which I cannot express. For days afterwards I could think of nothing else, and was full of astonishment that such expressions should ever find admission into the forms of the English church ; or if in the dawn of the reformation they obtained admission, that they should be retained, and preserve their place to the present day.

Were I permitted to address myself to the bishops and archbishops of the church of England, I would say, "reverend and right reverend fathers in God, do ye believe that ye have power to communicate the Holy Ghost by the laying on of your hands ; and also authority to retain and to remit sins ? If you do, shew me, I meekly beseech your lordships, your commission from Jesus Christ ; for I have not been able to find it in the word of God. If ye do not, why do you make use of words so much calculated to mislead, and to deceive, and which will do un-

speaking injury to all who are persuaded that you possess such astonishing powers."

A young clerk just invested with the priestly office may well think highly of himself, as he has been assured by no lower authority than that of the first ecclesiastical dignitaries of the land, that the Holy Ghost has been communicated to him, and a power to confer the remission of sins. Those who hear him preach, are in danger of considering what he says in the pulpit as the decision of the Holy Ghost, whom he received by the imposition of the bishop's hands in ordination. Is there not too much reason to fear that poor ignorant creatures on a death-bed, over whom he pronounces the absolution in the service of the visitation of the sick, will conceive that their transgressions are blotted out, because the clergyman, when endowed, received from the bishop power to forgive sins?

Dissenting Ministers have, millions of times, been branded with the degrading appellations of fanatics and enthusiasts. Ours, however, whatever it may be, is rational fanaticism, and sober enthusiasm, compared with this. Did we believe and profess that our ministers could confer the gift of the Holy Ghost; or that, by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, those ordained among us received power to forgive sins, we should deserve the name of arch-fanatics, and arch-enthusiasts. Certainly the largest portion of the most sublimated essence of fanaticism and enthusiasm, which was ever seen or known upon earth, is concentrated here. Exceedingly culpable, therefore, I should account myself if I were to unite in communion with such a church, and so give the world reason to believe, that I approve her claims. I

conceive it my duty to dissent, and thus bear my testimony against so monstrous an encroachment on the authority of Christ.

How dreadful is it that the service by which a person is ordained to the most solemn office should contain untruths! It is not my wish to offend, but in order to be understood, I must make use of words to convey my ideas, which will really express them. That a venerable bishop should introduce a person into the priest's office by saying what is untrue, and by professing to give what he knows he cannot give, is sufficient to rend the hardest heart with grief. That the person too, who is ordained, should hear untruths solemnly addressed to him in a highly religious act, and profess to believe that he receives what he knows he does not receive, and what neither the bishop, nor archbishop, nor any one else can give, is deeply to be deplored by every friend of truth. Such a commencement of the priestly office augurs ill for its future effects. At the consecration of a bishop there is a repetition of the same unedifying scene¹. The bishop ordaining addresses an untruth to the bishop ordained: the bishop ordained receives the untruth, and professes to believe it as a sacred verity; and to go forth under such an impression to the

¹ "Then the archbishops and bishops present shall lay their hands upon the head of the elected bishop, kneeling before them upon his knees, the archbishop saying, 'Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a bishop in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, amen. And remember that thou stir up the grace of God which is given thee by this imposition of our hands: for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and soberness.'" Form of consecrating bishops.

execution of his exalted office. Infidels have but too much cause to scoff, and to ridicule what is boasted to be the fairest representation of the religion of Jesus Christ. Tell me, gentlemen, why do you permit things so exceptionable to remain on the pages of your service-book? Why do you leave yourselves so entirely exposed, not only to the objections of dissenters, but to the scoffs of unbelievers? Why have your ecclesiastical leaders never applied to the legislature for an alteration in the form of ordination, which they would, no doubt, concede to you with readiness and pleasure? "We came here, sir, not to be catechised by you, but to hear your reasons of dissent. If you have any thing more to say, go on."

My objections to the entrance of the clergy on their office is not confined to the form of ordination. There are various things besides, which appear equally contrary to Scripture and reason: every thing appears out of place; and matters are so thrown into disorder by human regulations that it is difficult to know where to begin.

The church of England very properly requires that the person to be ordained shall have a congregation where he is to be employed; but when this is said, I have mentioned all that can be added in her favour. The relation between a minister and his people is a relation which is founded on choice. Without mutual choice there can be no mutual obligation. Were a strong man to drag a delicate maiden by force to the altar, and compel her to go through the ceremony of marriage, would she be bound in duty to honour and obey him? or if, instead of this, he chose a damsel, and went to the altar without her,

and the ceremony was so framed, that without ever asking her consent, or even her knowledge of the affair, she was to be told, that she was bound by law, to be his wife, ought she to feel the obligations of a married woman to such a man? The very supposition is absurd. Why should not the same judgment be passed as to the relation between a minister and his congregation, whose union must be equally the result of mutual choice. Among the dissenters this mutual choice always exists; but it has higher authority to recommend it to observance. It was the practice, the universal practice of the church for more than five hundred years after the commencement of the Christian æra: the clergy, from the highest to the lowest, were then elected by the people. Nor should it excite surprise in any, that this was the case; for it is founded in the very nature of things, and has reason herself for a support. An ecclesiastical constitution, which excludes the people from the election of their minister, has absurdity written on its face with a sun-beam.

But what are the regulations of the church of England in this respect? The people are nothing. They are in the state of the maiden who was married without her consent being asked; and who knew nothing of the matter, till a man came and said to her, "you are my wife: you must, love, honour and obey me." Like this hapless damsel are the people in most of the parishes in England. A clergyman comes to them with the patron's presentation in his pocket, and thus addresses them: "Dearly beloved brethren, I am your lawful pastor, and you are to listen to my instructions with reverence, to demean yourselves with becoming respect, and to perform every duty to

which a minister of Christ has a claim from his flock." If a preacher were to speak thus to a congregation of dissenters, they would suppose him to be one who had just wrenched open the door of his cell in bedlam, and escaped his keeper's hands. "We never chose you (they would say), we never invited you to be our pastor; and how is it possible for you to say, that we ought in duty to consider and treat you as our spiritual guide. Go whence you came; when we want you for our instructor we will send for you, and call you to the pastoral office among us; but from your present conduct, this is not likely soon to be the case."

In the established church, from long custom these ideas, so congenial to the spirit of Christianity, for so many centuries acted upon by the Christian world, and entering so deeply into the constitution of a Christian church, are entirely lost: the very faintest traces of them are erased from the souls of the people, and of the clergy too. But what supplies the place of the people's choice, and makes a clergyman to be minister of a particular parish? Invention has not been asleep; and not to the honour of mankind, ways have been found out, of which the best Christian antiquity was ignorant. A father may purchase a living in the church for one of his sons, just as he purchases a commission in the army for another. A person with a little management to avoid the charge of simony, can get one procured for him: and it is found, in many instances, to be a very profitable way of laying out a young man's patrimony, and to bring in a more ample return than either trade or commerce. Country squires and noble lords have the sole appointment of hundreds

and thousands of the clergy. Multitudes of benefices are in the gift of the crown, and are disposed of by the ministers of state: this is the case with the higher dignities of the church. For all civil purposes these patrons of livings may be very good and worthy men; but their competency, or their right, to nominate to offices in the church of Christ is a very different thing: though none may dispute their authority to do so in the parliamentary church of England.

An example will illustrate and confirm the position for which I plead. We should be backward in saying that a man is not a Christian without sufficient proof. But if the man says himself that he is not a Christian, I may very properly rest on his evidence. On this ground none will blame me for calling Lord Bolingbroke an infidel. But he was minister of state in the reign of queen Anne, and in the highest favour with her majesty; and by virtue of his office had the appointment of hundreds of rectors and vicars, of prebendaries, of deans, of archdeacons, and of bishops too. What a scene, gentlemen, is this which is presented to our eyes:—an infidel appointing the highest officers in the church of Christ! A man who regarded Jesus as an impostor, vested with authority to select bishops and priests who shall be best qualified and disposed to advance the ends of his divine mission! What we know to have happened once, may have occurred in numerous instances among the nobility and gentry; for it is not every infidel who openly declares his sentiments. A deist choosing a Christian bishop, and appointing him to a diocese! My mind is confounded at the sight of so heterogeneous a group. Have I not reason for being a dissenter?

The introduction of a clergyman to his office is of a piece with his appointment. Instead of being ordained in the presence of his flock, and the people bearing that part in it which, as one of the contracting parties, they ought to bear, the ceremony takes place at fifty miles distance, as if it were an affair in which they had no concern. When he comes to take possession of his living, he tolls the bell, he puts his fingers on the latch of the church door, and afterwards he reads the articles in the church. The people, if they please, may look on, and see him do these things. Such observances may make him a clergyman of the church of England; but whether they are adapted to constitute him a pastor of a church of Christ as delineated in the New Testament judge ye.

After the enumeration of so many subjects of complaint, I must add, that I strongly object to the harsh, rigid, severe, and utterly unaccommodating spirit of the church of England.—“ I can bear it no longer.—Was ever any of my sisters treated as I have been by this man? I am the church of England: and it is universally acknowledged, that a more venerable matron does not exist. My sons tell me that I derive my descent by a pure and uninterrupted succession from the apostles: and they well know what they say, for none are better qualified, by their talents and learning, to investigate the subject. Such language as yours shocks me, and makes me lose all patience. I daily hear it asserted, that I am the purest church in Christendom, and that every thing appertaining to me is primitive and apostolical; in short, just as it should be. It is not only my

younger children, the rectors, vicars, and curates who say so, but my elder sons, archbishops, bishops, and deans. They are continually saying so; and I believe them, for it must be true. Pray, sir, who are you, who dare treat me in so rude a manner? I suppose you are one of those whom I hear so frequently called by the name of fanatics and enthusiasts, people dangerous to the church, and disaffected to the government."

It ill becomes them, madam, to bring groundless accusations against men who are as true to their country, and as loyal as themselves. In love to my country I will not acknowledge myself inferior to any son in your numerous family: and I regard our happy constitution with as pure and ardent an affection, and more unbought. Those of your sons, who throw around them the fire-brands of jealousy and strife, are not the friends but the enemies of Britain. But, gentlemen, shall I be permitted to proceed, or must I stop? "We respectfully entreat you, dear mother, if you cannot hear with patience, to have the goodness to retire. You cannot suppose that the things we are obliged to listen to, can be agreeable to our ears.—But we have promised to hear him assign the reasons of his dissent.—Proceed, sir."

I was saying that I objected strongly to the harsh, rigid, severe spirit of the church of England. The demand of subscription to a long and multifarious list of articles of religion is an undeniable proof of my assertion. The uselessness of the thing is evinced by facts. In the church of England, subscription is required from every clergyman: among dissenters, the practise is unknown. Every man is left to judge for himself. But there is just as great an uniformity

of sentiments among them as in the church of England. The sentiments of the clergy are not regulated by their subscription. I will shew you books written by divines of the establishment which exhibit all the shades of theological opinion from Priestlyan socinianism, up to supralapsarian calvinism. Who then can boast of the utility and efficacy of subscription to preserve uniformity of doctrine. But it is worse than useless; it is calculated to exclude from the pastoral office, men of pure integrity who will not consent to say that they believe that to be truth which they do not believe. Nothing tends more effectually to destroy that delicate sensibility of conscience, which is a Christian's glory, and which ecclesiastical institutions should endeavour, by every means, to preserve, and to increase. Instead of aiming at so desirable an object, it would seem as if it were the design of the church of England to defeat it, by presenting such a multitude of things to the faith of the subscribers, as few comparatively can receive. Every clergyman is obliged to declare "his unfeigned assent and consent to all, and every thing, prescribed in and by a book, entitled, the book of common prayer, and administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the church, together with the psalter or psalms of David, and the form or manner of making, or ordaining, and consecrating bishops, priests, and deacons:" and he must *ex animo* subscribe these words, "that the book of common prayer, and of ordaining bishops, priests, and deacons, containeth in it nothing contrary to the word of God: and that it may be lawfully used: and that he will use the form in the said books presented in public prayer and administrations of the sacra-

ments, and no other" In this voluminous confession of faith there are many things which I do not approve, many things which I do not believe, and many things with which I cannot comply. From a church, therefore, which makes such additions to the religion of Christ, and demands subscription to them as of divine authority, and renders that subscription necessary for admission into the pastoral office, I consider myself fully authorised to dissent, whether as a minister, or a layman; for in either capacity a person is equally bound to exert himself for the faith once delivered to the saints, and for the purity of every Christian ordinance. But while I feel myself relieved by my dissent, I cannot but condemn the conduct of a church which lays upon the shoulders of her sons such heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne.

An unhappy peculiarity of spirit, which may be denominated, "stern severity," runs through the whole constitution of the English church. The Gospel enjoins and breathes gentleness, long-suffering, and bearing with the infirmities of the weak. In a variety of things, a specimen of which is given in the fourteenth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, where there cannot be unity of sentiment, it recommends that every man should be fully persuaded in his own mind; and that, amidst a diversity of opinions and practice in such things, there should yet be communion in one body, and the unity of the heart in the bond of peace. If this be the genius and language of the Gospel, ought it not to be the genius of the church of England, and her language too? But how different, nay, how opposite are both her spirit and her words. When I look at her, and hear her speak, instead of standing on Mount Zion, and

listening to the kind and tender accents of peace on earth, and good-will to man, I seem to be dragged to the foot of Sinai, and while I lift up my eyes in terror, I hear from amidst the smoke, and lightning, and thunder, words of stern rigour, and harsh severity, with which not one sound of mercy is mingled. It is still further to be deplored, that what too commonly happens to aged people has happened to her; this sternness and repulsive rigour have increased with her years.

“ You bring false accusations against me, you wicked man.” Indeed, madam, I do not. I will prove my charge, or consent to be thought what you call me. If the most learned, the most holy, and the most zealous man in England was desirous to take orders in the church, and scrupled three of the collects, two petitions in the litany, and the use of the burial service, would he be admitted to officiate as a clergyman? I trow not. If an eminent saint were to present his child for baptism, and to say to the rector, “ I do not approve of godfathers and godmothers, my wife and I wish to stand for our child, and take the vows upon ourselves;” would his child be received into the bosom of the church? “ No, sir, it would be said, it is impossible to comply with your desire; you must conform to the rubric.” Should the most pious man in the parish say to the priest, “ reverend sir, I scruple kneeling at the altar: pray allow me to sit while I receive the Lord’s supper.” Would his request be granted? You know it would not: In all these cases, the clergyman’s oath stands in the way, and he dare not, however much he may be inclined. “ Why should we give way to such weak people as these? Is it not proper that they should

yield to us, and not we to them?" This speech, my friends, was not dictated by the spirit of Christ, but by the spirit of the world. It savours strongly of its pride, haughtiness, and disdain. Besides, allow me to ask, if it be with them a matter of conscience, while with you it is not, who, according to the spirit of the Gospel, should yield?

Would Christ, think you, reject such a man as I have just described from being a minister of his Gospel, because he scrupled the use of a few things in the rubric? Would Christ refuse to baptize the child of two pious parents, because they disliked godfathers and wished themselves to devote it to his service? Would Christ deny the Lord's supper to a humble disciple who desired to receive it sitting, and thought it improper to kneel? Can you say that he would not? "Lovest thou me," would be the question from the lips of Jesus. If that was answered to his satisfaction, there would no obstacle in the way: the other things would all be overlooked. Is it not evil then in any church to enact regulations which prevent her from doing what Christ would have done? Does not this more resemble a rigid adherence to the forms of the Jewish law than the mild condescending spirit of the Gospel?

Perhaps it may be said, "have you not an unquestionable proof of the kind, lenient, and forbearing temper of the church of England, in being permitted to bring such accusations against her with impunity? It is a full answer to your charge." Pray do not mistake the matter. I am not more obliged to your church for the enjoyment of religious liberty, than I am to the army, or the navy, or the customs, and the excise: and I should as soon think of returning my

thanks for it to the commander in chief of the army, the board of admiralty, the commissioners of customs and excise, as to the hierarchy of the church of England. My obligations are to the constitution of my country, in which I glory. It is to it that I am indebted for that freedom of discussion which Britons enjoy; and which authorises me frankly to propose my sentiments to the consideration of all those who choose to pay any attention to them. The bitter reflections against dissenters, which appear from month to month in the publications of some of the clergy, but too plainly betray their dissatisfaction with the present state of things; and give us reason to conclude that if our privileges depended on their inclinations, we should not long continue to enjoy them. This, while it lessens any sense of obligation to that part of the church at least, makes me love the constitution and government the more, and unspeakably heightens the feelings of my gratitude.

What if I should add that I do not like to belong to a church which has a mark, that I cannot perceive in the church of Jesus Christ. "A spirit of tormenting fear" seems to haunt her, and on every occurrence which she fancies to be unfavourable to her interests, a long, loud, and bitter cry is heard, "The church is in danger, the church is in danger, the church is in danger." From the accession of the house of Stewart to the civil wars, it was the order of the day. From the restoration to the revolution severe acts of parliament against the dissenters were the effect of this doleful cry. During William's reign it never ceased. When Anne became his successor, it waxed louder and louder, and at last so agitated the nation as to

endanger the country's peace. In those days of old, when she uttered this mournful complaint, nothing pleased her better, and seemed to operate so effectually as a sedative on her fears, as severe acts of parliament against the dissenters, that it was difficult not to believe that she placed more reliance on the sword of the magistrate, than on the power of Christ. Not to descend to every instance, when the dissenters applied for a repeal of the corporation and test act, the cry of the danger of the church rang throughout the land; and from the strange events which have since occurred, and which have in succession been continued to the present day, the cry has been lengthened out for these twenty years. Dissenters have created the chief alarm, but of late the fear of Roman catholic soldiers and sailors, and Roman catholic officers in the army and navy, has taken off one of the church's eyes at least from the dissenters, and turned it towards Rome; or rather, some of the children are afraid of the dissenters, and others of the papists: and between the two a most doleful cry is raised; and the danger of the church excites a piteous wailing, which has been made by her most dignified sons, even at the foot of the throne.

From the pulpit, in all its gradations of splendour, from the cathedral to the village church, has the cry resounded. The press has teemed with hundreds of volumes, thousands of pamphlets, and passages without number, in works of various discussion, all echoing the complaint, "the church is in danger." The universities, which are the seminaries of the future pastors of the church, have ever been the first and the loudest in their complaints. Multitudes of the laity have caught the sound, and have felt as

much at least on the subject as those who raised the alarm.

But is the church so weak as to excite such lively fears? To all human appearance no establishment on earth is more firm and more secure. The king and queen, and all the royal family, are most cordially devoted to the church of England, with the exception of some Roman Catholic lords, for there is not one protestant dissenter, or but one, the whole nobility of the realm belong to her communion. She has the mass of the gentry: when they go to worship any where, it is in her temples, and at her altars. The army and navy profess the same faith: and a vast majority of the labouring classes in the community are of the religion of the country. Laws and acts of parliament without number, secure her in all her rights, and defend every outwork of the citadel. Was ever church so well protected by buttresses without, and faithful and zealous guardians within? And yet there is fear.

Is there cause of fear? Does danger exist? If not, it is wicked to raise a false alarm. If they fancy there is danger when there is none, they are weak, and it is no honour to have any connection with them. If it be insisted on that there was danger whenever the cry was raised, and there is danger now, I must say that I am greatly amazed. "But have not the universities lately said that the church is in danger: D. South called them the two eyes of the nation, and who will dare to contradict him?" Well, gentlemen, if you conceive this to be really the case, I can only say that if you think these two eyes look more deeply and profoundly into the building than those who are without, and know better its real state,

there must then be prodigious defects, some radical infirmities, perceived by those who are within the building, which we who are without can see nothing of. If this be the case, who that is wise would enter a place so full of hazard.

“ You talk, sir, as if there was no danger. Are you ignorant that the church of England was once destroyed by her enemies ?” Yes, I know the story : but she was the guilty cause of her own destruction. The king and his courtiers wished to rob the good people of England of their liberties. The clergy took the side of the court, and were strenuous advocates for arbitrary power. They persecuted the puritans, and they might, without danger to the church have ground them all to powder : but when they set themselves against the civil liberty of their country, the people of England, indignant at such despicable and mischievous officiousness, broke down the frame of the church, and began that dilapidation which ended in its utter ruin. May it be a lesson of wisdom to the church in all times to come.

But whether the church be in danger or not, the cry is enough to keep me at a distance from her walls. If an old man, passing by the side of a stately building, should happen to lose his balance, and fall against the wall, should people instantly sally forth from the door, and others look out at the windows, and all unite in the cry, “ you wicked old man, you have endangered the house, we are afraid it will fall about our ears,” most will conclude there is something very much amiss in that building which no one is sensible of but those within. The only remark I shall make is, that I do not choose to enter into such a building, or to have any concern with it.

Against the church of Christ, we have divine authority to assure us, that the gates of hell shall not prevail: and the assurance is confirmed by its existence for more than seventeen hundred years, in opposition to the most powerful efforts of numerous foes. But if the church of England be a part of the church of Christ, why is she so much afraid? I do not love a church of glass, which cannot bear the touch of a man's finger without danger, or without fear, which dreads the winds of heaven to blow upon her, and is afraid that the beams of the sun will scorch her face, and make her beauty fade, and threaten the extinction of her very existence. I love a church which can stand both heat and cold, which can endure frowns, and ridicule, and insult, and which can bear kicks, and cuffs, and hard blows, and which is not afraid of the malice and enmity of earth and hell: I love a church which can stand its ground by the power of divine truth alone without civil patronage. I will be a dissenter.

I thank you, gentlemen, for the patience with which you have listened to many things which cannot have been pleasing to your ears. Allow me to detain you while I mention one reason more. It is of a different kind from those which you have heard, but it is a very weighty one, and of mighty efficacy, for it has added ten thousands of members to dissenting congregations, who do honour to their profession, and are eminently useful in advancing the cause of pure and undefiled religion. To this reason I shall give the name of "the purity of doctrine and life of their ministers." I cannot explain it to you better than in the words of an old acquaintance of mine in

a country town, whom I was surprised to see at the dissenting meeting-house, attending with peculiar seriousness to the preaching of the word, when I was lately on a visit to a friend at the place. I first knew him in London, and he was a strenuous churchman, and used to jeer me for what he called my presbyterian and methodist precision. On expressing my astonishment to find him in a conventicle, he desired me to walk home with him, and he would satisfy my curiosity.

“ You know what I was, my friend (said he), when we lived together in the great city. I was a bigotted churchman, but utterly ignorant of the principles of the Gospel. No man was more strict in all the forms of religion : no man in London was more unacquainted with its nature and spirit : I may well say, that I had the form of godliness, but denied its power. You recollect that I came down to settle in this town. I married, and, as you see, have now a large family about me. I brought all my prejudices with me, and was one of the stiffest churchmen. For attendance on the ordinances of religion I was considered as a pattern by the whole parish. A pious neighbour, who, came some years after me to the town, and was as constant at public worship as myself, but on other principles, sought my acquaintance, and was at great pains to instil into my mind the doctrines of the Gospel. He found great fault with the clergyman and his preaching, which very much surprised me, for I thought him a very fine man. He had been accustomed to hear Mr. Romaine and Mr. Newton, and other evangelical clergymen in London : and was so disgusted at the conduct and ministrations of our rector, that though his prospects in trade were ex-

ceedingly flattering, he quitted the town, and went to reside where he said he could find food for his soul as well as for his body.

Though I had attained from him no clear views of the Gospel, yet what he said made me very uneasy, and I began to fear that things were not so well with me as I thought. Some troubles which I met with, while they shewed me the vanity of the world, increased my anxiety about eternal things. So ignorant was I of the way of salvation, that I may justly compare myself to a person who has lost his way in a forest in a dark night, and knows not to which hand to turn. About this time a young man came to live with me, whose parents dwelt in a neighbouring town. I liked him in every thing but his being a dissenter. He used to spend much of his leisure time in reading good books, with which he was supplied by an aunt. I happened one day to take up a volume he had left in the parlour, which was "Dodridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul." I opened on a passage which very much struck me, and began it. Seeing me engaged with it, he took no notice and let it remain. I read it through, and felt myself condemned, but saw there was hope. As I would now take nothing on trust, I examined every passage of Scripture which he quoted, to see if it was fairly adduced in proof. Some time after, in the same way, I read a Scotch book, entitled, "Boston's four-fold State of Man." It was less attractive than Dodridge, but it entered more deeply into the principles of the Gospel. It rendered me more uneasy than before, and fully convinced me that I had all my life been wrong. I read likewise some pieces of Mr. Romaine and Mr. Newton. I began now to direlish

the preaching at church, and from week to week it became more and more disagreeable to me, so that I really found it difficult to sit it out.

“Excuse the interruption, but pray, sir, what kind of man was your rector?” He was the son of a genteel family in the neighbourhood, in whose gift the living of our town was: about thirty-five years of age: he is said to be a man of considerable literature, and an elegant scholar. He is caressed by all the nobility and gentry around; his company is much courted; he spends a good deal of his time among them; and occasionally goes a shooting and hunting with them. His evenings are generally spent in company and at cards, and I have formerly been sometimes of the party: he is a subscriber to the assembly, and is a constant attendant there. He is a justice of the peace, and discharges the office with singular ability: not one in the neighbourhood can be compared to him. In his private character he is exceedingly amiable, obliging, generous, and he is compassionate to the poor in a very high degree. O that his public character did but correspond! He often hurries the service over in a very careless manner, though he can read it exceedingly well, and occasionally does so. As to his sermons they are any thing but what they should be. The fall of man, the miserable state of an impenitent sinner, redemption by Christ, justification by faith, and regeneration by the Spirit of God, fundamental principles of Christianity, and exhibited too in the articles of the church of England, he appears never to have heard of. If at any time he says any thing about them, it is worse than his silence, for he generally ends with contradicting them.

Such was, and still is our rector. As his defects

became daily more apparent, my dissatisfaction increased. At this time a respectable neighbour, who was a dissenter, died, and I attended his body to the grave. A funeral sermon was to be preached in the evening, and it was expected, as a testimony of regard to the deceased, that all the mourners would attend. I had never been in the meeting-house, and was extremely unwilling to go, but the other churchmen constrained me. I entered with reluctance, and heard with jealousy and shame. The seriousness and earnestness of the preacher's manner struck me. His doctrine was the same that I had read in the books I have mentioned, but rendered more impressive and affecting by the living voice. His character of the deceased convinced me that there was more in religion than I had yet experienced. The awful yet affectionate exhortation to sinners to prepare for death, made me tremble, and inwardly cry for mercy. When I went next Sunday to church, the rector's discourse was insupportable. O how I wished that the dissenting minister preached at church. I did not venture to meeting again for some time; but at length, having found an excuse, I attended a second time. The text was, Matt. xi. 29. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The representation he gave of the Saviour's compassion and grace, and his earnest exhortation to sinners to come to him for rest, so powerfully impressed my soul, that I hope I was then enabled to believe in his name; and I was filled with joy and peace in believing. By this change in my heart my prejudices against dissenters were considerably lessened. I determined to remain steadfast to the church, but to go to meeting in the evening to the

lecture. It was autumn: and I used to go a back way to slip in unperceived; and if I happened to meet any of my church acquaintances, I was not a little abashed, and used to turn another way, till they were gone. Winter soon came, and I rejoiced to be able to go in the dark, unnoticed by my neighbours. This continued for some time, but it made me more and more unhappy. The discourse of the morning was contradicted by that of the evening. The errors of the church seemed the more glaring and odious, from the brightness of the truth at the meeting. I began to reason on my conduct: is not the pure doctrine of salvation by Christ, wherever it is preached, infinitely more important than all outward forms of worship and modes of church government? May I not lead others to live and die in error by my continuing to hear it? Ought I not to bear testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, by supporting it, and worshipping statedly where it is preached? Reasonings of this kind passed through my mind from day to day; and every sermon I heard at church added to the poignancy of my reflections. I at last determined to go to meeting in afternoons too. But this increased my disquietude. The brighter shining of the truth made error the more intolerable. My wife and children I used now to take along with me; and was happy to find them better pleased than I could have expected. A seat was procured for our accommodation. I had invited the minister to come and see me at my house, and found his conversation both instructive and agreeable. I had determined in my mind to leave the church altogether, and go to meeting. And this determination had not been formed without much prayer to God for counsel, and serious

consideration of the subject, and conversation with my wife and family.

Just before I had put my purpose into execution, my old pious neighbour, who first spoke to me on the subject of religion, passed through the town, and an eminent evangelical clergyman with him from London. When they first called I was out. On my return I sent for them. They had heard in the mean time, from the people of the place who had for some months began to ridicule me, and sneer at my methodism, that I was gone mad, and had become a dissenter. He instantly began with me, and said, "My old neighbour, how sorry I am to hear that you have left the church. I expected better things from you, than that you would forsake the religion in which you was bred, and become an encourager of schism." The clergyman then took up the argument, and earnestly intreated me to abide by the established church. "If the preaching (said he) be not what you could wish, you have the liturgy, which is most excellent, to edify you. Stay and pray the Gospel into the church; pray for the conversion of your rector, and think what a blessing it will be, if he should be converted. Or if you are determined to go to no place but where the Gospel is preached, you can take a ride and hear good Mr. A. the vicar of B. which is only five miles off. Only do not leave the church."

As my mind was full of the subject from ruminating daily upon it, and as this was said in the presence of my family, on whom it might have an improper influence if suffered to pass unanswered, I resolved to argue in my own defence, and to reply to the doctor's counsel. Before I had time to begin, my

friend added with great earnestness, "Pray do not leave the church, but follow the doctor's advice. He is a man of God, and his ministry has been crowned with remarkable success. I am sure we shall have your wife and children on our side. Do not you, madam, approve of what the doctor says?" This completely roused me, and I immediately stood forth to defend my conduct.

Gentlemen, I highly respect you both, the one from character, and the other from knowledge, and I wish to pay a due deference to your judgment and experience; but I must obey God rather than man, and the sacred Scriptures, not your opinions must be my guide. The doctor tells me, that if the preaching be not what I wish, the liturgy is most excellent. But, gentlemen, does the New Testament lay so little stress on preaching, and so much on prayer? Does it not, on the contrary, represent the Gospel preached, as of prime importance? Does the doctor's counsel receive any confirmation from the doctrine of the apostle Paul, Gal. i. 8, 9. "There are some that would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed." That such a man, for the rector preaches another gospel, is a minister of Christ, and preaches the truth, I am desired to make the world believe by attending at his church. The apostle John gives the following advice to an elect lady, (2 epistle 10, 11.) "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine (the doctrine of Christ, ver. 9.) receive him not into your house,

neither bid him God speed : for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds." But you say, " do not forsake the ministry of such a man, but submit to him as your pastor." What Paul and John represent as a heinous crime, you recommend as a duty : and when I can attend at a place where the Gospel is purely preached by a good man, you urge me to attend on a man of the world in a place where it is not preached at all. Can you really think, doctor, that I ought to do so ? Might not a socinian, or arian, plead with equal strength and say, " the Scriptures are read in our place of worship, and if you do not approve the doctrine preached, you may be edified by the word of God, therefore do not leave our society." You appear to me, gentlemen, to make the outward forms and modes of church government to be of more importance than the doctrines of the Gospel. However sound the articles of the church may be, and however orthodox her doctrine, what avails it to me and my family, if these articles be not understood or believed by our rector, and if the orthodox doctrine be not preached in the place where I live : it is of no more benefit to me than if the doctrine of the church were heresy, and she had no articles at all. This argument therefore, though frequently and confidently urged, however forcible it may be to such as have an opportunity of hearing the Gospel preached in the establishment, is no better than insult when applied to me who hear nothing within the consecrated walls, but what tends to mislead, and ruin the soul for ever. " We did not expect, sir, such a reception from you. My friend wished me to call, as he thought that my advice would be of service in attaching you to our excel-

at church, and preserve you from schism. But if you do not choose to listen to the friendly counsel, we only say that you may repent of your conduct, and we wish you a good morning." I am sorry, gentlemen, to intrude on your time and patience: but pray hear me out in my own defence, and then condemn me. "Let us go, doctor." "No, we will stop and hear what Mr. — has further to say. Go on, sir." You told me also, that I should "stay and pray the Gospel into the church, and that my prayers might prove the means of the conversion of the rector." Were you in earnest when you said so, or did you mean it as a joke? "I do not joke, sir, on such subjects: I was in earnest." Then, doctor, I can only express my astonishment. From what passage of Scripture, or from what principle of Christianity do you derive such a precept? I live in a town where there are two places of worship: at one of them the Gospel is preached, in the other it is not: and you say I should go to the place where it is not preached, and employ myself in praying for the minister's conversion. Till that takes place, I must lose all spiritual edification for myself and family. Why should I go to church to pray for the clergyman's conversion? May I not pray for him though I go to meeting? And have I not as good reason to hope for an answer to my prayers while I hear Christ's Gospel, as if I were to continue to hear error. On what peculiar foundation is my faith in this prayer to rest? What greater encouragement have I hope for his conversion, than that of any other sinner in England? If he were converted, he would be but a novice, both in standing and knowledge: and such the Scriptures exclude from the pastoral office. Years must

elapse before he could be an edifying preacher. But how seldom do such instances of conversion occur? For one or two examples of wordly ministers converted by good people's prayers, might not hundreds be found, who, notwithstanding all the supplications which are offered, continue worldly still? And ought I to suspend my own edification, and the salvation of my rising family on so uncertain an event? I have a family, for whose eternal happiness I feel the most lively concern: will not their salvation be endangered if they should grow up under the preaching of a man, who is, every Sunday, polluting their minds with error by perverting the Gospel of Jesus Christ? And may it not be an irreparable loss to them to be deprived, at the most important season of life, of the pure doctrines of the New Testament? Will not their blood be required at my hands? Will Christ sustain it as a valid excuse, when I plead, that though the Gospel was preached at a dissenting meeting-house, I could not bear the thoughts of leaving the church of England; and that I daily prayed with great earnestness for the rector, who was a worldly man, that the Lord would be pleased to convert his soul?"

Is not the spirit of the Scriptures too, full against you? When a Christian settles in a place, it is his duty to see if there be a minister of Christ under whose pastoral care he may enjoy the ordinances of the Gospel, and to him he should attach himself. If he find him of the same sentiments as to outward forms, the more satisfactory it will be; but if he cannot, an agreement in evangelical doctrine is to determine his judgment. If there be a person in the town of the same mind as myself, as to external forms, but who does not preach

the Gospel, he is no minister of Christ at all, and I think that there is no competition between the two, and that it ought not to occupy my consideration for a moment, whether I ought to attend on such a man. An evangelical minister, and a worldly erroneous clergyman belong to two different masters. The one promotes the cause of Christ, the other promotes the cause of the devil. And ought I to advance the devil's kingdom by encouraging and countenancing his servant as if he were Christ's; and turn my back upon Christ's servant as if he did the work of the devil? I tremble, doctor, at the very thought, and while I do not wish to be wanting in respect, I must say that I look upon your counsel, though it wears the garb of piety, to be most pernicious cant, and I hope you will never venture to give it to another.

I will detain you but a moment longer while I take notice of your remaining counsel. Mr. A. of — is a very worthy man; but his church is at the distance of five miles from my house. To take my large family there would be extremely inconvenient, and unreasonably expensive. If I stay over more than one service I must spend the interval at an inn. The noise and bustle of the journey, and the attraction of objects by the way are all unfavourable to spiritual improvement; and that part of the family which is necessarily left at home, is without an instructor or a guide. Were it impossible to find the Gospel nearer, I should think it proper to make many sacrifices, in order to have the privilege of hearing it. But with a family I should certainly consider it my duty to remove to another situation, where it would be within my reach. As I can enjoy the Gospel to my satisfaction at the distance of two

hundred yards from my own house, and all my family with me, and we can comfortably spend the intervals of worship in domestic improvement, I cannot see it to be my duty to travel ten miles merely to have the liturgy prefixed, and for the sake of it alone, every word of which I can read as well as the parson, to consume both time and money, which can be more profitably employed.

I have now, gentlemen, set before you my views, and my ideas, of what is my duty. I have, as yet, taken no steps to leave the church; and if you will have the goodness, doctor, to point out where my reasoning is destitute of justness and force I shall be much obliged to you: be assured that I will listen to you with an impartial mind. "No, sir, I have nothing more to say. I do not love controversy, and am very sorry to see that you have imbibed a spirit of disputation: it will be a great curse to you. It is always my way to give my advice. If the person listens to it, he receives the benefit. But if he begins to argue and object, I have no more to say, and leave him to his perverse humour. I expected that you would have received my counsel very differently. May the Lord give you a more humble and teachable spirit. Farewell." "Old neighbour, pray dont leave the church, or you will be sorry for it when it is too late."

This conversation matured my purpose into execution. I bid the rector and his church adieu; and went with my family to meeting, and have continued there ever since in the enjoyment of much pleasure and benefit from the ordinances of religion. The minister is a man of God. He minds nothing but the work of Christ, his master. His life and conversation are agreeable to the Gospel. His preaching

is evangelical, instructive, experimental, and animating. He is exceedingly earnest in seeking the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the faithful. Extemporaneous prayer seemed odd to me at first, as I had always been accustomed to a form; but I now prefer it, and a form appears to me dull and flat. The purity of communion which is preserved in a dissenting society gives me great satisfaction. I could not now communicate with pleasure at church, on account of the promiscuous admission of all kinds of characters, without distinction, to the sacrament. The private meetings for religious exercises have contributed greatly to my improvement: and the acquaintance and intimate converse of some very judicious and eminent Christians have been of unspeakable service to me, and to my family. I joined in communion soon after I quitted the establishment: my wife has become a member since, and my eldest daughter is to be admitted to the Lord's supper in the beginning of next month. As for the younger children, their mother and I are endeavouring to instruct them in the principles of the Gospel, and to train up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Such, sir, is the way in which I became a dissenter: and I acknowledge that I am strongly attached to their principles, and purpose to spend my days among them, whoever may come to be clergyman of the parish church, and I wish my children to follow my example.

This, gentlemen, was my friend's account; though long, I hope it has not been tedious: it is important, as it explains not his reasons only, but the reasons of thousands for leaving the church of England, and joining the dissenters. If I should say there are hundreds of thousands among the different denomi-

nations who joined them on this account I should not be guilty of exaggeration. They became dissenters from feeling a concern for the eternal salvation of their souls, and their inability to procure instruction on the subject in the parish church'.

' That this is likely to be the case in many hundreds of instances will not appear strange to those who read the following account of the persons admitted into orders in the establishment. It is given by a prelate of considerable note, Dr. Gilbert Burnet, bishop of Sarum, in his Preface to the third edition of his *Discourse on the Pastoral Care*, page 25, 26.

" Our Ember weeks are the burthen and grief of my life. The much greater part of those who come to be ordained are ignorant to a degree, not to be apprehended by those who are not obliged to know it. The easiest part of knowledge is that to which they are the greatest strangers ; I mean the plainest part of the Scriptures, which they say, in excuse of their ignorance, that their tutors in the universities never mention the reading of to them ; so that they can give no account, or at least a very imperfect one, of the contents even of the Gospels. Those who have read some few books, yet never seem to have read the Scriptures. Many cannot give a tolerable account even of the Catechism itself, how short and plain soever. They cry and think it a sad disgrace to be denied orders, though the ignorance of some is such, that in a well-regulated state of things they would appear not knowing enough to be admitted to the holy sacraments."

" This does often tear my heart. The case is not much better in many, who having got into orders come for institution, and cannot make it appear that they have read the Scriptures, or any one good book since they were ordained ; so that the small measures of knowledge, upon which they got into holy orders, not being improved, is in a way to be quite lost ; and then they think it a great hardship if they are told, they must know the Scriptures and the body of divinity better before they can be trusted with the care of souls. These things pierce one's soul, and make me often cry out, oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest ! What are we like to grow to ? In what a case are we to deal with any adversary, atheist, papist, or dissenters, or in any sort to promote the honour of God, and carry on the great concerns of

I could assign more reasons, gentlemen, for my dissent, but I will not trespass further on your patience. When those which have been assigned are duly weighed by angry churchmen, it is to be hoped that dissenters will hear no more of the heinous sin of schism, which has of late been as plentifully sprinkled on them, as the holy water by a zealous devotee of the communion of Rome; or rather as the mud in the streets of London by the broad foot of a dray-horse on the passengers who are near.

In the scriptural sense of the word (and that is the only sense worth attending to), schism denotes a separation, in heart and affections, from those who are walking according to the institutions of Christ; and it may include an entire departure from their communion. But wherein am I guilty of this offence? If I denied Christ to be the only head of the church, and associated with such as do, it would be schism; but I assert his sole authority in his church. If I were a member of a society which assumed the right to alter, to add to, or to take away from what he established, it would be schism: but I plead for the integrity of Christ's constitution, and associate with those who do. Shew me that I separate from a church of which Christ is the head, whose doctrines are the pure and simple doctrines of the Gospel; whose worship is that which Christ the Gospel, when so gross an ignorance in the fundamentals of religion hath spread itself so much among those who ought to teach others, and yet need that one teach them the first principles of the oracles of God?"

Whether bishops are now more easily satisfied, or the persons who apply for ordination are better divines than they were then, are matters of grave consideration.

prescribes; which maintains a godly discipline by restraining transgressors from her communion, and admitting only such as appear to be his true disciples; which displays kind forbearance, and gentle condescension, to weak and tender consciences, and from these marks demonstrates itself to be the church of Christ. Show me that I separate from such a church, and I will confess mine iniquity, and own myself guilty of schism.

But if I separate from a mere parliamentary church, which was formed into shape out of the chaos of popery by acts of the English legislature, and had no existence before the year one thousand five hundred and sixty; a church which, in none of its features, bears a resemblance to any thing earlier than the ecclesiastical constitution of the fourth or fifth century; and in some, to what did not appear till the ninth or tenth: a church which has so many things to be complained of in its constitution, its head, its doctrines, its worship, its services, its sacraments, its discipline, to call this schism, and charge me as a schismatic, because I am not of her communion, and cannot conscientiously declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all her multifarious code:—to call this schism! Surely it is full time that the word was dropt, and that the accusation ceased. I repeat it. Schism is an alienation of heart, and a separation from Christ's institution, not from man's inventions. They who would impose such inventions on the disciples of Christ, instead of his institutions, they are the schismatics, not those who separate from them for conscience sake^s.

* The lawfulness, and indeed the propriety of separation in such a case is confirmed by the authority of men whose judgment has

To try your patience further, gentlemen, would be an ungenerous abuse of good nature. Though I could assign many other reasons, I will leave the cause on these; and I have no fear of their being insufficient, if they be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. They are equally applicable to a layman as to a minister. Should not every layman be as much concerned as a minister for the purity of the Gospel, for the simplicity of the institutions of Christ, and for the full exhibition of those grand general principles which so highly conduce to the glory of God, the honour of religion, and the happiness of the human race.

been always highly respected by the most eminent members of the church of England. The celebrated Mr. Hales of Eaton, in his *Essay on Schism*, says, "That where cause of schism is necessary, there, not he that separates, but he that is the cause of the separation, is the schismatic. And when either false or uncertain conclusions are obtruded for truth; and acts, either unlawful, or ministering just ground of scruple, are required of us to be performed; in these cases, consent were conspiracy, and open contestation is not faction or schism, but due Christian animosity: For that it is alike unlawful to make profession of known or suspected falsehood, and to put in practice unlawful or suspected actions." Chillingworth's name needs no epithet of praise. His sentiments on this subject are contained in the following words: "If a church impose and enjoin sin and error, then we must forsake men rather than God, and leave the church's communion rather than commit sin, and profess known errors to be divine truths: to say the Lord has said so, when he has not said so, is a great sin, be the matter never so small." "I may, without schism, divide from that church which errs on any point of faith, fundamental or otherwise, if she requires the profession of this error among the conditions of her communion." No one ever doubted Dr. Hammond's attachment to the established religion of his country. Writing on schism, he delivered it as his judgment, "that any imposition of what is, or is thought to be sinful, in any communion, will justify people's departing from that communion; and that we must not at all adven-

These reasons receive inconceivable force from a testimony given in their favour by two thousand credible witnesses. Acuteness may point an argument, and press it 'deep into the mind: eloquence may adorn it, and combine beauty with strength; but there is a line of conduct, there are actions which display the weight of reasons far more powerfully than either or both of these. An example is exhibited in that, by which two thousand clergymen of the English church chose to give up their livings, and expose themselves, and their families, to poverty and absolute want, rather than violate the purity and peace of their consciences, by declaring their assent and consent to the Book of Common Prayer, and conforming to things which appeared to be contrary to the sacred Scriptures. At the reformation, the mass of the clergy veered about with every political change of the national faith. When Charles the second was restored to the throne, a multitude of the clergy who, from all the rigid severity of Laud's, episcopal usages, had, with ease, changed to the different modes of church government and worship, during the suspension of monarchy, found no diffi-

ture on the least sin, or suspected sin." Bishop Stillingfleet, who was the champion of episcopacy, says, "we think the requiring of doubtful things for certain is good ground enough for us not to embrace communion with the church, unless it may be had on better terms." See a Dialogue justifying separation from the church of Rome.

If the reasoning of these eminent episcopal English divines be conclusive, when they are arguing against the accusations of schism by the church of Rome, it is equally conclusive reasoning when used by dissenters against accusations of schism by the church of England, whose imposing spirit has been fully proved. Thus out of the mouth of her own sons we are justified from the charge.

culty in reverting again to the former rites, accompanied with some additional hardships. But those two thousand confessors all appear as faithful witnesses for the strength of these reasons in favour of dissent : witnesses who may be depended on for their veracity, as their testimony was of more value in their eyes than the enjoyment of their temporal comforts.

All that now remains is to request that the reasons may be attentively, impartially, and seriously considered. It is, I know, a common idea with many, that dissenters are a headstrong, unreasonable set of people, who have but little to say in their own defence ; and that their objections to the established church originate merely in narrowness of mind, violence of prejudice, and impatience of ecclesiastical controul. But let them weigh our reasons, and we trust they will be of a different mind. We are neither ashamed nor afraid to exhibit them to all the world ; and we receive pleasure from the thought, that they may be examined in centuries to come, when local and temporary circumstances being far removed from view, they will be considered in their intrinsic worth without any adventitious circumstances to bias the judgment on the one side, or on the other. I call God to witness, that it is not the pride of liberty, nor an impatience of ecclesiastical authority, which has produced these sentiments, and led me into a communion different from the majority of the nation ; but a sense of duty to Christ, the great Head of the church, and a desire to approve myself to him as a faithful servant. I plead no exemption from civil authority. I feel my obligations to obey

every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake ; and in all civil affairs, to render obedience to the powers which be^t. But in religion, I call no man father : " one is my master, even Christ." And as I conceive the distinguishing principles which I have espoused to be not only true, but important both to the honour and advancement of religion, I think myself bound to make a stand for them, and to proclaim them openly to the world.

I most cordially thank you, gentlemen, for the patience with which you have listened to me, especially as, consistently with your sentiments as churchmen, you could not listen with approbation. You now know the reasons of my dissent. Examine them at home with seriousness of mind, and pray, and act according to your conviction.

^t It has been exceedingly common of late to represent dissenters as such, to be enemies to the state and to the constitution. This accusation has come from the lips and pens of dignitaries of the church, who, from their situation and opportunities, should have known better : we say nothing of those underlings who hope, by toad-eating, to rise to preferment in the church. But no charge can be more groundless. The gentlemen need to be informed, that the constitution, as to its ecclesiastical part, comprises not merely the episcopal church, established in the year one thousand five hundred and sixty (that was Laud's English constitution), but the establishment of protestant dissenters by the act of toleration, in the enjoyment of the rights of conscience, and liberty of worship. I have as good a right to profess my religion publicly as a dissenter, as the archbishop of Canterbury has to profess his : and I have as good a right to make converts to my faith as a dissenter, as he has to make converts to his church ; because the constitution of England, which has conferred these privileges on the archbishop of Canterbury, has conferred them also on me. When converts are made, I trust mine will understand their duty to God, and to their country, as well, and perform it as faithfully as his.

To say that the dissenters, who are exerting themselves for the

“ We thank you, sir, for the pains you have taken to set before us the grounds of your separation from our church. While you were speaking, we frequently felt your keenness, and we were ready to be angry: but when we considered that an advocate must be allowed to set his arguments in the strongest light, and that though it may hurt the feelings of the opposite party, it is a liberty which he ought to enjoy in order to do full justice to his cause, our anger ceased, and we heard you without prejudice. We will think of what you have said, and be assured that we will act according to the dictates of conscience.

salvation of their fellow-subjects, are enemies to a constitution which protects and cherishes them, and which allows them to make as many converts as they please, is one of the greatest acts of injustice and absurdity. When they are seeking, with the utmost zeal, to diffuse their sentiments, they are acting in perfect conformity with the spirit and letter of the British constitution. Besides, have not the dissenters much to lose as well as others from any injury sustained by their country? And do they not feel the bonds of gratitude to a constitution, to which they have every reason to consider themselves as under the highest obligations? They do, and they feel them with delight, and will support it with all their powers.

CHAP. III.

CONTROVERSIES IN WHICH THE DISSENTERS
WERE ENGAGED.

SECTION I.

THE DISPUTE WITH MR. DAVIS, OF ROTHWELL.

THE church militant is a name which has been given to the society of Christ's disciples in the present state. When its warfare is accomplished, and they have all entered into heaven, it is called, the church triumphant. Had the epithet militant been annexed for the zeal of Christians in contending for the truth with spiritual weapons, it would have conferred the highest honour. Not a drop of human blood ought the church ever to have shed, except her own for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is the horrid decription, given of the anti-christian church, "I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." A perfect contrariety should mark the character of those who profess to belong to the pure church, which Jesus has redeemed with his most precious blood. But, alas, where is the protestant church, in whose skirts will not be found at last the blood of those, whose hearts have been broken by the anguish of suffering, or who have inhaled death from the contaminated atmosphere of damp and gloomy dungeons. From such inhuman

conduct, infidels might suppose that they had found valid objections to the Christian faith, unless the spirit of prophecy, by predicting that thus it should be, had not anticipated their cavil, and given additional evidence to the truth.

A more legitimate warfare is exhibited by religious controversy when it appears as an advocate in behalf of the doctrines of the Gospel, in opposition to every error. To this, however, some are decidedly opposed, and consider controversy in every form as hostile to the cause of true religion. When at any time it is introduced, they are filled with disgust, and wish it to be banished from every pulpit, and from every press. Whatever these persons may be able to plead in their own behalf from principles of reason, they will find no support from the general practice of mankind.

Since the Saviour died for sinners upon the cross, no age has been without religious controversy, except when the world was so deeply immersed in ignorance, that there did not remain ability to dispute. But when this was recovered, controversy revived, and has continued to the present hour. Loud as the anathemas of the advocates for peace have been, they have availed nothing. "Why, say they, cannot you agree to differ, and not trouble mankind with your contentions, and your sermons, and books of strife." Perhaps on an investigation of the subject, these men will not be found to be so much in the right as they imagine themselves to be.

If all were of one mind, and received the truth in love, or if their differences related to matters which scarcely affect the cause of spiritual religion, to abstain from controversy would be a duty, and a bless-

ing. But when important truth is attacked, must it not be defended? When Christ's pure doctrine is impugned, must it not be established and confirmed? This reasoning is exalted into demonstration by examples from the sacred Scriptures. When we reflect that the Lord Jesus Christ not only revealed to men the doctrine which the Father sent him to make known, but also exposed the erroneous sentiments of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees, and reasoned against them frequently, and with fervour, the system of controversial quietism receives a mortal blow. When it is farther considered that the apostles followed their Master's steps, that several of their sermons in the Acts consisted in reasoning with Jews and Gentiles, and several of their epistles to the churches are chiefly controversial, the enemies of all controversy must retract their opinions, and acknowledge that they were wrong. It was once right they must allow, to dispute about religion, because Christ and his apostles did so : and if an attack be made on evangelical truths of equal importance now, is it not the duty of the friends of Christ to stand forward in their defence? However popular therefore the declamations against all religious controversies may have been, it appears that they deserve neither the adoption nor the praise of the enlightened disciple of Jesus Christ. In some good men, the sentiment may have proceeded from an abhorrence of contention, and an excessive love of peace ; but in many others, there is reason to fear that it may have originated in a criminal indifference for truth.

Of the abuse of controversy a wiser class of men has complained with grief and tears. In how many instances have warm contests been maintained about

mere words. Those whose minds were not heated by taking a side, were at a loss to know what was the subject of dispute. How often have things of small importance been the matter of long and bitter wrangling, when a moderate portion of Christian forbearance would have enabled the disputants to live together in peace and love. When important truth has been the subject of debate, there has been but too often very much to blame in those who have stood forth as champions in its defence. That, in numerous instances, they have betrayed a spirit of pride, arrogance, self-conceit, malice, an impatience of contradiction, and misrepresentation of the opinions of those on the opposite side, is too evident to be denied. But what do all these amount to in the way of proof?—only that controversy, like other things, may be abused; that it may be excited when there is no occasion, or on insufficient cause; when a valid cause exists, that the persons who engaged in it are unqualified for the task; and that if ever they write again they should contend with a different temper, and speak the truth in love: but not that to defend the truth in the spirit of the Gospel, is either useless or improper.

Religious controversies may be classed under two heads. The one consists of such as furnish no sufficient reason for dispute, and which originate in misapprehension, bigotry or an irritable temper. The other relates to important doctrines of Christianity when they are perverted or denied; and in defence of which the zealous disciple of Jesus is called to appear. A controversy of this latter kind will come before the reader in the ensuing period of the history; but during the present one, those which existed among the dissenters, were of the other kind,

It may be numbered among the benefits of persecution, that it keeps the disciples of Christ from contending with each other, by giving them full employment in another, and a more profitable way. On the other hand, seasons of outward peace, "which should be improved as in the days of the apostles, when the churches had rest, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied," have been too often employed in contention and strife. Such was unhappily the case after the revolution, by which the blessings of religious liberty were spread over the land. It was an angry time. Disputes abounded in the establishment between the high and low church parties, and were carried on with excessive bitterness and heat. The dissenters likewise became infected with the disease, and the destructive mania raged among them for several years. Every thing, says the philosopher, has two handles, a right and a wrong one: unhappily the men who entered the field of controversy seemed disposed to lay hold only of the latter.

What first engaged the attention of the dissenters, in the way of controversy, was the doctrine and conduct of Richard Davis, minister of the congregational denomination at Rothwell, in Northamptonshire. From the mountains of Wales he had gone early in life to London, and was there engaged in the instruction of youth. He was a member of the church under the pastoral care of Mr. Thomas Cole, a strenuous independent; and in his future practice he carried that system to the highest pitch. Having a desire to be employed in the work of the ministry, which was approved by the brethren, he was called to labour at

Rothwell, and ordained in the beginning of the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-nine. His zeal in the exercise of his office knew no bounds. His labours were most abundant ; and to his own personal exertions he added the help of the gifted brethren of his church, whom he sent round the country in every direction, to call sinners to the knowledge of the truth. It was an age of regularity ; and practices so uncommon stirred up many adversaries. Complaints against him were loud in the country around, and were sent up to London in exaggerated tones. The united ministers gave too much heed to the reports of his enemies, and published a declaration, in which they charged him with a variety of antinomian errors in doctrine, and with irregularities in his ministerial practice, which tended to the destruction of all order. Undaunted by the name or number of his opponents, Mr. Davis stood forth in his own defence ; and after supporting his theological system, he notices their accusations against his irregular practices in carrying on religious exercises in so many places, and thus replies : “ we preach in occasional meetings, in visiting the members of the church who are scattered over a great extent of country, and form a part of my pastoral care. We preach when requested by other godly persons. When we carry the Gospel into dark groves and places, out of mere bowels of pity and compassion to poor souls : for this we have a precedent in the apostle Paul, who saith (Rom. i. 14.), ‘ I am a debtor, both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians ; both to the wise and the unwise.’ So are we. We obey the Lord Jesus Christ, who commanded to go and teach all nations, by offering his grace to sinners as far as we are able. We preach

the word, being instant in season and out of season." (2 Tim. iv. 2.) Why do not they, if they pretend to authority, thrust out some of that great swarm they have in London (that eat the fat, and drink the sweet) to offer the grace of Christ to the poor country people."

Whatever praise may be due to the good intentions of the London ministers, they would have manifested greater wisdom if they had not interfered in the business; for, as is usual in such cases, their interference did ten times more harm than good: it widened the breach, and spread the flames of discord and suspicion. But when Mr. Davis is heard in his own defence, as every man ought to be, the accusations of his adversaries, as to the erroneousness of his doctrine, dwindle into a point; and it plainly appears, that the London ministers were imposed upon by blundering hearsays, and inaccurate reports^a.

In doctrine, Mr. Davis was, what is called, a high Calvinist, ; but he understood the system well, he applied it with great force to the consciences of men, both good and bad, and he connected together with judgment, both doctrine and practice. His ideas concerning conviction and conversion were more clear than those of many of his brethren. His native Cambrian ardour, it is probable, carried him beyond what English coolness would call regular and prudent. They who can make no allowance for eccentricities, but condemn as a crime, what should be regarded at most as an infirmity; who ascribe to the badness of the heart, what ought to be attributed to the crisis of

^a See account of a most horrid and dismal plague at Rothwell; and, Truth and Innocency vindicated in answer to the former, by R. Davis.

the animal frame ; who would reduce all to one standard, and one measure, and, like Procrustes, lop off what exceeds, and stretch what is defective in length ; though they may please themselves, and produce an apparent uniformity, will find in the end, that they have injured the cause of Christ. What is gained in uniformity, they will at last perceive with grief is more than lost in energy and vigour ; and that an injurious restraint is put upon useful dispositions in human nature, and a check given to that variety “ of gifts which the Holy Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will,” for the edification of the church of God.

With all his peculiarities and extravagancies, which were probably increased by the unkind and bitter opposition of his brethren, Richard Davis appears to have been a very pious man, and an extraordinarily zealous minister of Christ. From some occasional sermons of his, which were published, it is plainly seen that he must have been remarkably popular. There is a simplicity, an animation, and a pungency in them which, if seconded by a suitable elocution, must have made a powerful impression on the hearts of his hearers. His zeal was of the most ardent kind ; and England at that time, perhaps, scarcely could produce a man of more abundant labours in the Redeemer’s cause. Not satisfied with performing the duties of the pastoral office to his flock at Rothwell, he added the character of an itinerant too ; and extended his journeys eighty miles, in every direction around the place of his abode : his converts became members of his church ; and as they lived at a distance, and could only attend on particular occasions, they had religious meetings among themselves for

prayer, for conversation, and for preaching, as opportunities were afforded. That they might enjoy these in the greater abundance, he called forth the most intelligent members of his church into action, and employed them in itinerating within his extensive circle. In itinerancy Mr. Davis was not the first in his day. Several non-conformist ministers spread their labours over the county in which they lived, and some made stated preaching tours of considerable extent. Good John Bunyan made Bedfordshire, and some parts of the neighbouring counties, the ground of his diocese; and the members of his church dwelt in many of the towns and villages where his preaching had reached and converted them. But to Mr. Davis must be assigned peculiarly the practice of calling in the members of the church so abundantly to his aid, and making use of their exertions in advancing the work which he had begun. This part of his conduct gave singular offence to his brethren, especially those of the presbyterian order, who were at that time by far the most numerous denomination of the dissenters. It was one of their charges against Mr. Davis, that he sent forth a swarm of tailors, weavers, dyers, shoemakers, and farmers to preach. A regular education for the ministry was considered by the presbyterians as a qualification almost indispensable. Among the independents this idea did not prevail, and there were ministers among them who had not enjoyed any advantages of a literary kind. Of those lay-preachers whom Mr. Davis sent out, several afterwards became pastors of churches formed from the societies which he had collected in the towns and villages in which he was wont to preach.

To the honour of Mr. Davis it must be mentioned that he had imbibed a principle, the want of which at that time was exceedingly injurious to the cause of religion, and circumscribed within narrow limits the usefulness of many excellent men. It may be named the principle of *propagation*. It arises out of a conviction in the mind that it is the duty of every Christian to spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel to the utmost of his power, and to the farthest extent of which he is capable: and that wherever there are people destitute of the truth as it is in Jesus, if they are within his reach in any way, it is incumbent on him to do every thing within the compass of his ability, that the word of God may be preached to them for their salvation. On this principle did Mr. Davis act; and he united in himself the office and character of pastor, itinerant, and primitive bishop presiding over his humble presbyters who aided him in the labours of his diocese.

Had Mr. Davis been treated with greater kindness by his brethren, it is highly probable, that we should not have had so many of his eccentricities and peculiarities to lament. By the affectionate counsel of wiser men, he would have been led to see the impropriety of them, and to shun them; but the violence of their opposition destroyed all that influence, and the more he differed from them, the nearer the truth he conceived himself to be. While we throw the veil of compassion over his infirmities, it must give pleasure to every friend of religion to witness the fervour of his zeal, and the multiplicity of his labours to extend the knowledge of Christ, as far as his exertions could possibly reach. Had this been the general spirit of the dissenting ministers of his time, their cause would

have been more prosperous, and true religion more prevalent in the world. His example does not appear to have been followed by his successors ; and itinerating zeal seems to have died, and to have been buried with him, till it was raised from the grave by the apostles of methodism. But let posterity give to his memory the praise which is justly due, and hail Richard Davis as the morning-star of propagation.

SECTION II.

THE CONTROVERSY RESPECTING DR. CRISP'S
WORKS.

ABOUT the same time another dispute arose among the dissenters, known since by the name of the neonomian controversy. It took its rise from the re-publication of the works of Dr. Crisp in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety. Tobias Crisp was of a respectable and opulent family in the city of London. Part of his university education he received at Cambridge, and part at Oxford. He was appointed rector of Brinkworth, in Wiltshire, where he lived greatly followed and admired for his preaching, and greatly respected for the humility and sanctity of his life. When the civil wars broke out, the soldiers of Charles's army (as was their usual custom to ministers who were not of the old formal high church stamp) treated him with such cruelty, that for the sake of personal safety he was under the necessity of leaving his rectory and retiring to London. After continuing there for some time, he was seized with the small-pox, and died in the year one thousand six hundred and forty-two, in the forty-second year of his age. On his death-bed he expressed an entire resignation to the divine will, and a lively expectation of eternal blessedness.

In the earlier part of life, the doctor was a favourer of the arminian system; but he afterwards saw reason

to renounce it, and became a calvinist, and more than a calvinist. As the pendulum, when at the greatest distance from the perpendicular, does not on its return stop there, but vibrates as far to the opposite side, thus it often happens with those who have embraced what afterwards appears to them an error : they think they can never run to too great a distance from it, and the more remote they are from their former opinions, the nearer they are to the truth. This was unhappily the case with Dr. Crisp. His ideas of the grace of Christ had been exceedingly low, and he had imbibed sentiments which produced in him a legal and self-righteous spirit. Shocked at the recollection of his former views and conduct, he seems to have imagined that he could never go far enough away from them ; and that he could never speak too highly of the grace and love of the Redeemer, nor in too degrading terms of legality and self-righteousness. But it was judged by many, that he went to such an excess in magnifying the grace of God as to turn it into wantonness : and that he was so severe against all legality and self-righteousness, that true holiness, and obedience to the divine will were in danger of being discarded as useless, or even condemned as hurtful. He was fond of expressions which alarm, and paradoxes which astonish. Many of these, a person skilled in theology will perceive to be capable of a good meaning ; but readers less instructed, who compose the most numerous class, are in danger of misapprehending them, and of being led into pernicious errors. The good man, for such he appears really to have been, perplexed and puzzled his brains about the divine purposes. He did not distinguish as he ought between God's secret will in his decrees,

and his revealed will in his covenant and promises ; and in his views of the decrees he frequently speaks as if he had forgotten that they have respect to the means, as well as the end. He was likewise deficient in accurate ideas of the substitution of Christ in the place of the redeemed, and of our Lord's mediatorial office, both in procuring and applying the blessings of redemption.

On his arrival in London, the divines of that city expressed their disapprobation of his doctrines, as not according to the faith which was once delivered to the saints. After his decease, three volumes of sermons were published from his notes. When they came from the press, it is said that the Westminster assembly talked of having them burnt, as a just punishment of the heresy which they contained. Mr. Flavel and others of the non-conformists exposed his errors, and expressed a lively sense of the dangerous opinions which the doctor held. The controversy, however, was at rest, when his son, just after the revolution, republished his sermons, with some additions, in a quarto volume ; and procured to the work the attestation of several ministers, that the discourses were really the doctor's own productions, and copied from his manuscripts.

At this distance of time we are apt to think, that had no notice been taken of the book it would have been confined to a few : it would have been read without interest but by a small number of people, and would soon have died away as to its remembrance and its effects. Six or eight hundred copies might have been sold, and remained in the cabinets of his adherents, while the rest of the world knew not that such a man as Dr. Crisp, or his book, ever

had existence : and thus the injury done by them would have been confined within very narrow limits.

The judgment however of the men of that day was different. In most cases, to take no notice of such publications, and to observe a profound silence respecting them, is certainly the wisest way. But there are seasons when false sentiments of a certain kind are congenial to the dispositions and taste of the age ; and when they spread with rapidity far and wide, and infect, like a pestilence, the public mind. In that state of things, to drag them forth to public view, and to expose them, however painful it may be, becomes an imperious duty. Such a time, some contemporary writers say, was that in which the works of Dr. Crisp appeared, as multitudes, both of the independents and baptists, were carried away with the flood of error. Deeply affected at the sight, men of judgment and piety invited Dr. Williams to enter the field of controversy against them, and to warn the religious public against the noxious poison.

Williams possessed talents for the undertaking. He had a clear logical head, he was well skilled in polemical theology, and he entered on his work of confutation with as much candour as can be well expected in a controversial writer. Having collected Dr. Crisp's opinions into certain heads, he states under each what is the truth ; what is the error which Dr. Crisp maintains, and quotes passages from his writings in support of the charge ; he takes pains to specify wherein the doctor does not differ from the common sentiments of divines, and after that, wherein the difference really lies ; and he points out the way in which the doctor was led into the error. He then establishes the truth from the sacred Scriptures,

from the confessions of the reformed churches, and public bodies, and from the writings of the most eminent divines, whose orthodoxy has been universally acknowledged. Whatever ideas may be entertained of the sentiments of Dr. Williams, the fairness of his manner is certainly entitled to general praise; and had those on the other side adopted the same method it must soon have appeared wherein the real difference between them did actually consist^b. His work, which is entitled, "Gospel Truth stated and vindicated," was published in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-two, and had the names of some of the most eminent of the London ministers affixed to it by way of recommendation. Not wishing to appear as partisans in the contest, they do not vouch for every expression or sentiment of Dr. Williams, but modestly say, that "in all that is material he had fully and rightly stated the truths and errors; and they hoped that the work would do considerable service to the church of Christ."

If in Dr. Williams's zeal against antinomianism he seemed to recede towards the opposite extreme, it

^b A weekly lecture at Pinner's hall had for some time been carried on by six of the most eminent of the united ministers in London. Dr. Williams was one of them, having been chosen in the room of Mr. Baxter. But now the managers would no longer allow him to preach in his turn. His friends established a lecture at Salter's hall, to which he was accompanied by Dr. Bates, Mr. How, and Mr. Allsop, his fellow-labourers in the former; and two more were added to them. Two only remained at Pinner's hall, Mr. Cole and Mr. Mead, to whom an addition was made of four more of the independent denomination. For the men who could drive away Dr. Bates and John Howe from a lecture, it is a happiness that their names are unknown; for certainly to escape being enrolled in the annals of infamy was the highest felicity for which they could hope.

will not appear wonderful to those who have taken a comprehensive view of the effect of controversy upon the human mind. But considering the extent of doctrine which his book embraced, his antagonists were able to lay hold of but little, on which they could ground a successful attack. The outcry made on the appearance of Dr. Williams's publication was loud and fierce. By many of the independents and baptists he was represented as undermining the very foundation of the Gospel, and their pulpits rang with his heresy.

The press too exposed their enmity before the eyes of the public. In the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-three a large quarto volume came from the pen of Mr. Isaac Chauncy, an independent minister, entitled, "Neonomianism Unmasked;" for that was the name invented to designate, and to disgrace Dr. Williams's sentiments, and his book. Had this champion followed the method of the writer whom he attacked, by fairly stating what were the truths which he held, and the errors which he opposed, the controversy must have speedily been terminated; or, at least, every one must have seen what was the subject in dispute. But his book, drawn up in the form of a dialogue, does not present those clear ideas, that accuracy of definition, nor that precision of argument, which are adapted to bring controversies to a close, or satisfy the minds of the persons engaged. His spirit was bad, and his accusations against Dr. Williams for heresy were numerous; but they were mostly as weak as they were bitter.

While many, by rushing into the fire, were involved in flame and smoke, some of a calmer and wiser mind, beholding the controversy with grief,

were earnestly desirous to heal the wounds which were so injurious to the dissenting body, and to close the breach which opened a way for the assaults of their common adversaries; with this design, they, after much deliberation, drew up a list of the doctrinal articles which were the subject of debate, and stated them in a plain and peaceable form: these were agreed to by the controversialists on both sides, and by both parties they were subscribed. From this measure much good was expected by the friends of peace; but their expectations were disappointed, for the fault seemed to be more in the heart than in the head, and there appeared a determination to differ at any rate.

Angry writings and angry speeches continued to harrass the public mind; and the next year, Dr. Williams published a "defence of the Gospel truth," in answer to Mr. Chauncy's work. Dr. John Edwards, of Cambridge, a writer whose character for orthodoxy was secured by his "*Veritas redux*," and other theological treatises, expressed his full concurrence by publishing "*Crispianism Unmasked, or a discovery of the several erroneous assertions and pernicious doctrines maintained in Dr. Crisp's sermons.*" Mr. Chauncy, for what controversialist will be outdone, replied to Dr. Williams, and afterwards sent forth several more pieces on the subject in debate.

In the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-four, the controversy was at its height. Papers were drawn up, and passed between the presbyterians and the independents (for the dispute had now assumed a party form) in order to the renunciation of arminianism by the former, and antinomianism by the latter. Had the good men been properly cooled by

upon his adversaries. Failing of success in this way, they thought that perhaps the charge of heresy would adhere more closely to him than that of immorality ; they therefore accused him of socinianism. With as much justice they might have accused him of being a worshipper of the Delai Lama of Tartary.

But to enumerate all the stages of the controversy would be tedious to the reader. Year after year attempts were made for peace, but without effect. Mr. Humfrey, Mr. Allsop, Mr. Lobb, Mr. Thomas Goodwin, and several others had a share in the dispute. Towards the close of it, "an appeal," by Mr. Lobb, a strenuous antagonist of Dr. Williams was written, and an application was made by him to Dr. Stillingfleet, bishop of Worcester, who was considered as a master of this controversy. But far from approving Mr. Lobb's side of the question, he wrote to Dr. Williams, who had likewise consulted him, expressing full approbation of the manner in which he had stated the doctrine in dispute, and condemning Dr. Crisp's notions with the greatest severity. The bishop had also begun an answer to Mr. Lobb's appeal, but death arrested him before it was completed. What he wrote was published as a second part of his defence of the satisfaction of Christ. The commutation of persons between Christ and believers (the main hinge of the controversy) is clearly stated ; and the opinions of the socinians on the one hand, and of the antinomians on the other, are exposed and confuted. Here too he bears witness to the orthodoxy of Dr. Williams, and while he conceives that some were tainted with Dr. Crisp's errors, he can see no reason for so much heat among the rest,

^c Dr. Williams's works, Vol IV, p. 405.

and intimates "that there must be something farther in the matter than appeared to an indifferent and impartial reader, which he would not inquire into."

Application was also made to Dr. Jonathan Edwards, of Oxford, whose "Preservative against Socinianism" proved him to be an adept in every thing relating to that controversy; and who was considered by Mr. Lobb to be friendly to his side of the question. From him too Dr. Williams received an honourable testimony as having stated the doctrine of Scripture, concerning the satisfaction of Christ, in an orthodox manner. As for the opinion of Dr. Crisp, and those of his party, concerning the commutation of persons between Christ and the sinner, he could not but look upon it to be "not only false, absurd, and impossible, but also an impious and blasphemous opinion, as being highly dishonourable to our Saviour, repugnant to the wisdom and justice of God, and leading plainly to subvert the whole design of Christianity^d.

Here lay the root of Dr. Crisp's error, which shot its fibres into almost every subject. He viewed the union between Christ and the believer to be of such a kind as actually to make a saviour of the sinner, and a sinner of the Saviour. He speaks as if God considered the sinner as doing and suffering what Christ did and suffered; and Christ as having committed their sins, and as being actually guilty of them. The confusion and dreadful mistakes arising hence can scarcely be described. If we add to this, that his mind was perplexed about the divine decrees; and that he confounded them with God's revealed will, and his gracious promises, and

^d Williams's works, Vol. IV. p. 124.

strangely blended the divine purpose, and the execution of it as one and the same thing, the reader will perceive the cause of his mistakes. The unhallowed influence of these opinions the doctor, like many others who have asserted them, appears not to have felt. But when he scattered them among the multitude, he was like a man throwing fire-brands, arrows, and death; or an ignorant and conceited empiric dispensing mortal poison to his patients, while he imagined that he was giving them a cordial of sovereign efficacy, which could not only preserve life, but even restore it to the dead.

Time at last effected what reason had, for seven years, attempted in vain—a termination of the controversy. Death removed some of the combatants. Some, it is probable, were taught to entertain more sober views, and some grew weary of disputing. The congregational brethren united with the presbyterians in bearing their testimony against antinomian errors: and Dr. Williams, in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-nine, closed the whole with a treatise, entitled, “Peace with Truth, or an End to Discord.” In this work he considered that declaration of principles as a sufficient foundation for cordial union, and any remaining differences as matters for the exercise of Christian forbearance.

Thus ended the controversy called the neonomian, by Dr. Crisp’s adherents, and the antinomian, by Dr. Williams and his friends, which occupied seven long years, which might have been more usefully spent; and a waste of talents, which might have been better employed; and millions of thoughts and passions, which might have been more profitably

directed to more important subjects. With no difference of judgment among most of them, as to all the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, but merely by using a phraseology, which was misinterpreted by the opposite party, they brought themselves to imagine that they differed widely, and that those on the other side held dangerous errors. In proportion as their minds were heated, their surmises became more unfavourable, and their alienation of heart from each other was increased.

As to the effects of this controversy but few of them can be contemplated with pleasure. A more accurate statement of the doctrine which has been the subject of debate, is a benefit usually resulting from the theological warfare, and it was the fruit of this bitter and tedious contest. Few, except such as are sunk into the very dregs of antinomianism, have dared since that time to revive the crude phraseology of Dr. Crisp. It is one of the advantages of the age in which we live, an advantage unbought by us, but dearly purchased by the controversialists of former times, that we have learned to express the doctrines of the Gospel with greater clearness and precision, and to guard against words and phrases which are ambiguous, or liable to misinterpretation or abuse. But let not this be considered as a proof either of superior wisdom or superior goodness : he that stands on his neighbour's shoulders will see farther than he, without being either taller in stature, or having a quicker sight. Some asserted, that by the publications of Dr. Williams and his friends, the antinomian doctrine received a fatal blow, and fell into such disgrace, that at last only two or three preachers in London, and these of no

note, were found to stand up in its defence ; and that the truth, in all its parts, could then be preached without offence, and heard without clamour*. But most probably, this will not be granted by those on the opposite side. At any rate, had the controversy never had existence, it is likely that the pure doctrine of the Gospel would have been more readily received, and no suspicions of error awakened in men's minds to break their peace, and obstruct their edification.

But by far too manifest were the evil consequences resulting from this dispute. The spirit displayed by the polemics, and their perseverance in contention during the space of seven years, in opposition to the most earnest entreaties to desist from strife, cannot be mentioned with too marked disapprobation. Many there were indeed, both presbyterians and independents, who took no share in the controversy, and preserved both their hearts and lips from the unhallowed warfare. At the same time, there were but too many on each side, both ministers and private Christians, who drank deeply of the foaming cup of controversy, and felt its intoxicating powers to the injury both of themselves and others.

When ministers enter warmly into a controversy, the spirit which is inhaled from it is infused into their preaching. The poor people are pestered with bile, and must witness its introduction into the pulpit, instead of the pure unadulterated word of life. And because their minister has chosen to be a man of strife, the congregation must be tormented with his quarrels, and miserably doomed to hear his anathemas against those who have opposed him. If they

* Nelson's Life of Bishop Bull, p. 274, 5, 6.

be preserved from the contagion of a polemical spirit, the pleasures of the sanctuary are destroyed, the tone of their minds is hurt, and they depart from the ordinances of God with grief. If, unhappily, they imbibe their pastor's spirit, their situation becomes more and more deplorable. Strife is their delight. Instead of the Gospel of peace they love to be entertained with controversy; and it gives them pleasure to hear those who differ from them confuted and condemned. In the mean time, the soul grows lean: spirituality and devotion of heart are lost: and the keenness produced by controversy but ill supplies the place.

Another evil of equal or greater magnitude is frequently found to accompany this. The whole strain of his preaching undergoes an unhappy change. When a minister has been warmly engaged in supporting what he considers to be the cause of holiness, and the obligations of Christian duty, against those who are supposed by him to turn the grace of God into wantonness, it is often found to have a pernicious influence on his future ministrations. Obedience to the divine commands is the general theme of his discourses. He seems as if he were afraid of the doctrines of grace: he is shy of preaching them, and they are mentioned but seldom: and when he does mention them, instead of its being done with that ardour of delight, which they ought always to inspire, it is with timid caution, with anxious solicitude that they may not be abused, and with many directions for preservation from the dreaded abuse. Hence the animating virtue of these precious truths is lost; and the preaching, robbed of that unction which they convey, is meagre and ineffectual.

On the other hand, when the man who, in a controversy like this, conceives himself standing forth as the champion of the doctrines of grace against what he calls legality and neonomianism, he is too frequently observed to run to the greatest distance from this error, but it is to a distance too from the path of truth. He is justly loud in his praises of the free and sovereign grace of God, and too loud in its praises he can never be; but he seldom speaks of holiness, and duty, and obedience to the divine commands; and he says strong dashing things of the doctrines of the Gospel, as if they superseded the necessity of subjection to the divine authority, and conformity to the divine image. If at any time he notices them in his discourse, instead of urging them on the conscience with the earnestness of one zealous for the authority of the Lord of Hosts, and for his glory in the obedience of his creatures, he seems more afraid that they should lay too much stress on the performance of their duty, than that they should entirely neglect it. If such a minister and people adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour by a conversation becoming the Gospel, it may justly excite surprise. High pretensions to inward experience, lively feelings of joy, exalted ideas of themselves as the favourites of heaven, accompanied with a sovereign contempt of others, may be commonly found in a very abundant degree: but the humble spirit of unreserved devotedness to God in heart and life is more rarely to be perceived. The nourishment is injurious to the constitution; it is as if children, instead of living on milk, should be fed with ardent spirits.

The extensive and baleful influence of this partiality of the human heart, though the person himself may

be insensible of it, is exceedingly to be deplored ; and has been in every age productive of the worst of consequences, both to the interests of the Gospel and to the souls of men. It would be easy to give a list of writers whose works, from this unhappy bias, are far less useful and acceptable than they would have otherwise been, and of some who are rendered by this defect exceedingly pernicious. But it is a more pleasing office to point out whom men should imitate in this respect, than whom they should avoid : and it is delightful to reflect that there is a perfect pattern for imitation in the sacred Scriptures. There the two extremes in this controversy, against which the opposite champions professed to contend, are dragged forward into view : they have their root in the depraved heart of man, are known by the name of sensuality and pride, and are the two thieves between which Christ has been crucified in every age. The two great principles also, in defence of which they mutually declared that they entered the field of controversy, namely, grace and holiness, are here fully exhibited before the eyes of men ; and are enjoined and enforced in a manner which every minister of the Gospel should carefully notice and invariably imitate. While the sacred writers occasionally warn mankind against the abuse of the doctrines of grace, they every where extol these doctrines in the highest terms of eulogy, and are at a loss for words to express and celebrate the fulness and freeness, and condescension of the love of Christ. On the other side, while in the strongest words they point out the danger of entertaining a pharisaical spirit, and of seeking to be justified by the works of the law, they urge the obligations of the divine commands upon the conscience,

with all the authority of God ; they specify the various duties of relative life with a particularity which is not generally imitated as it ought to be ; and they enforce the observance of them as absolutely necessary to the glory of God, and the existence of the Christian character, and as constituting the several parts of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Were this divine pattern constantly before the eyes of every minister of the Gospel, to observe and to copy, what improvement should we observe in their discourses. That it should be held up before the face of those who are engaged in controversies of this nature, is peculiarly necessary, as they are in imminent danger of having their minds turned aside from the purity and fulness of evangelical truth. It is needful too for the preacher who lives in a place where the dispute is carried on, though he himself may take no active part, as the error designed to be overthrown may have extended its ravages into his flock, and as his own mind is also in danger of receding to the opposite extreme. If the persons appear to verge to the antinomian system, let him preach the riches of divine grace, and all the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel as fully as he possibly can. If on the contrary, they run into what is called the legal and self-righteous scheme, and seem to overlook the great principles of the Gospel, let him not be afraid to bring forward, and enforce the duties of Christianity, and the commands of God ; but let him inculcate them with as much earnestness and force as it is in their power to do. Let this difference however be seen between him and them : instead of confining himself to one part of divine truth and nearly

forgetting the other, let him, according to the pattern shewn him in the sacred Scriptures, diligently attend to both. While he enlarges with cordial delight on the doctrines of grace, let him display their sanctifying influence on the heart and life of the disciple of Jesus; insist on the absolute necessity that these effects should be produced; and maintain that where they are not produced, it is an evident proof that the doctrines are neither believed nor understood. When like a faithful minister he changes his theme, and treats on the duties and virtues of the Christian life, and presses them home on the hearts and consciences of his hearers, let him distinctly point out their connection with Christian principles, their dependence on the doctrines of the Gospel, the manner and spirit with which they are to be performed, and the absolute necessity of divine influence on the soul, in order to render man's obedience agreeable to the nature of God, and acceptable in his sight. By this method errors which threatened ruin, will most probably be arrested in their progress, and in time banished from the place. At any rate, whatever may be the issue, it is the way in which God has commanded his servants to act, to which therefore they ought carefully to attend. Should they, instead of observing the divine direction, follow the bias of the heart, and lean to the opposite side, the error which they wish to oppose will gain ground; the souls of the people will be injured from not having the whole counsel of God presented to their view; and an error directly contrary to the other be unhappily generated. From such beginnings, without any design to mislead, but merely to guard against erroneous opinions, the purity of the Gospel has in many places been gradually lost.

By this angry controversy, the character of the dissenters must have sustained considerable injury in the eyes of the world. Persecution they had borne with dignity, firmness, and patience : and their conduct had exalted them in the judgment of impartial beholders. Might it not have been expected, that when the revolution presented them with peace and liberty, they would exert themselves with all their might to promote the cause of pure religion. But alas, in the short space of four years, many of them in the metropolis are wrangling about strifes of words ; and instead of making extraordinary efforts for the salvation of souls, the strength and energy of their minds are wasted in unnecessary disputes. While those who, in the midst of the noise, kept aloof from controversy and its feverish heat, are entitled to praise, let the men who engaged in it so keenly and so long, from the pulpit or from the press, whether presbyterians or independents, bear that severity of reprehension which their conduct merits.

But what is worst of all, religion suffers amidst the strife. How extensively might these ministers have diffused the knowledge of Christ, while they were worse than uselessly contending with each other ! Had the whole strength of their souls been concentrated in preaching Christ, so as most effectually to turn sinners from the evil of their ways, and bring them to the Saviour, what glorious success might have resulted from their labours ! But they enter the pulpit to confute heretics, to dispute about theological nicknacks, and to rouse the passions of their hearers against those of the opposite side. Will this mode of instruction excite the attention of the young, the poor, and the multitude ? Or if it should, will it

do them any good? Will the Spirit of God breathe on such discourses, and render them the power of God unto salvation? No: he will withdraw and leave the angry souls to their furious heats, and their favourite notions; and *ichabod* will be legible on the walls of the sanctuary, written with the finger of God himself.

At this distance of time, it is not easy to trace, with precision, all the effects of this unhappy controversy; but contemporaries unite in their assertions that it was extremely injurious to the interests of vital godliness^f. If the question be asked, which party was most to blame, there appears reason to conclude that the independents must bear the largest share. Perhaps there was not a single presbyterian who did not hold what we account the doctrines of the Gospel. What apology then shall be made in behalf of the independents, for their stiff, unyielding, unaccommodating spirit, for their bitterness in charging their brethren with dangerous error, and for clinging fast to a certain peculiarity of opinion, and phraseology with which genuine orthodoxy had no necessary connexion. There is reason to conclude that many of them were narrow-minded men, and fierce for the singularities of their system; but who had not studied as they ought the enlarged, the humble, meek, and gentle spirit of the Gospel, nor read to a valuable purpose the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians. May the beacon, which the writers in this controversy erected, be seen, and the dangerous quicksands avoided by all their successors from age to age.

^f Calamy's Continuation. Nelson's Life of bishop Bull.

SECTION III.

CONTROVERSY CONCERNING THE VALIDITY OF
THE DISSENTING MINISTRY.

ONE of the strongest passions in the human heart is the love of power. Whether it has been more displayed in ecclesiastical than in civil affairs, may admit of dispute; but it must be allowed to have been equally potent in the church as in the state. This spirit reigns equally in individuals, and in communities; and while it has been exhibited in numberless instances by kings and popes, it has shewn itself in as prominent a manner in the dominant party in the government, and the established religious sect in the country. A striking instance of this occurred during the present period, in a combination of numerous ecclesiastics to destroy, with deep thrusts of their spiritual swords, the very existence of dissenters as a Christian body.

However difficult such an attempt might appear to others, they conceived it to be perfectly easy, and that it was crowned with complete success. "The baptism of the dissenters (they say) is no baptism, their dispensation of the Lord's supper is no sacrament, their prayers, as ministers of Christ, are no prayers, and have no influence, and their preaching is no preaching, and utterly destitute of effect: they are therefore all of them without the pale of the church of God." But on what foundation could they rest so weighty a charge? They reasoned thus: "ordination is absolutely necessary to make a man a minister. This ordination

must be performed by the laying on of the hands of a bishop; and that bishop must have derived his office and authority by a regular succession from the apostles. Such an ordination the dissenting ministers have not had: they were ordained by presbyters only, who have no right to ordain. Therefore their ordination was not valid: they are no ministers of Christ, but continue mere laymen, and all their ministrations are invalid, and have no effect. So that though the poor unhappy people think they are baptized, and have received the Lord's supper, it is a dangerous mistake: all their ministrations are a mere nullity."

Such was the strain of reasoning adopted by a considerable portion of the high-church clergy, during the reigns of William and Anne, in numerous discourses from the pulpit, and compositions from the press. How such a fancy should bear sway in the minds of rational and literary men, may justly be the subject of inquiry: and in tracing the history of the English church, we may find something by which it will be accounted for. The first reformers, whatever faults they might have, do not seem to have been deeply infected with priest-craft, or to have entertained very high ideas of their own spiritual dignity and authority². Kings seemed to be mightier men in their idea, than

² In a select assembly of divines, convened by the authority of Edward the sixth, it was given by archbishop Cranmer as his opinion, in which many concurred, "that bishops and priests were at one time, and were not two things, but both one office in the beginning of Christ's religion. That a bishop may make a priest by the Scripture, and so may kings and governors also, and that by the authority of God committed to them, and the people also by their election. For as we have read, that bishops have done it, so Christian emperors and princes usually have done it. And the people before Christian princes were, commonly did elect their bishops and priests. In the

priests. Episcopacy was not considered as necessary to the existence of a church of Christ: and the foreign protestant churches, though many of them had no higher officers than presbyters, were regarded as sisters; their ministers were embraced as brethren, and the ordinances dispensed by them esteemed as valid as their own.

But while this was the spirit of the leading men, the mass of the clergy, who had changed their profession four times, no doubt, still remained papists in their hearts, and cherished those exalted ideas of priestly power, which they had imbibed in their early education. Their posterity, and those brought up under their influence, would naturally inherit the same dispositions. In the days of James the first, this spirit began to shew itself in open day, and with greater strength in the reign of Charles the first. So widely different were the sentiments of the ruling clergy from those in the reign of queen Elizabeth, that the other reformed churches in Europe were no longer regarded as the legitimate progeny of the same mother. The church of Rome, which in the symbolical writings of the Anglican church is represented as the whore of Babylon, was now considered as a chaste virgin espoused to Christ; her sons were embraced as brethren, and their ministry and services accounted valid, because in their ordination a bishop had laid his hand upon their shaven crowns; while the unbishoped churches of the reformation were disowned as of spurious breed, and their ministers were said to be in "pretended holy orders."

New Testament, he that is appointed to be a bishop or a priest, needeth no consecration by the Scripture; for election or appointing thereto is sufficient." *Stillington's Irenicum*, p. 392.

The prevalence of this spirit among the clergy may be judged of from this circumstance, that Goodman, bishop of Gloucester, who presided over the protestant clergy of that diocese, professed himself a papist, and died in the year one thousand six hundred and fifty-five, in the communion of the church of Rome^a. *Ex uno disce alios*. Others were suspected, but there was no proof. Laud has no injustice done him, when it is said that he was half a papist, and entertained ideas of priestly authority not much inferior to those of the conclave at Rome. Looks of tenderness and regard were cast towards the Romish church; and if the pope would have laid aside his pretensions to domineer over them, and have permitted the king and the bishops to divide his power between them, there would have commenced an ardent friendship between England and him, and perhaps a cordial union. When heaven sent the *civil* wars to scourge the enemies of the civil and religious liberties of the English people, these adherents of Rome, the high-flying clergy, fled the country, or entered into private life, or prudently shaped their conduct to the times.

At the restoration, such men, as may naturally be supposed, were the favourites of the court, and rose to the most eminent stations in the church. Their principles, which sufferings, and opposition had more deeply rooted in their hearts, were now proclaimed and inculcated upon others. Into such hands the universities fell; and the youth destined to govern the church imbibed the palatable doctrine. To persuade them that the office, for which they are destined, has a peculiar measure of spiritual authority annexed to it, and that no other religious sect in the country

^a Complete History of England, vol. III. p. 193.

is entitled to the smallest portion, is so flattering to the pride of the human heart, that it requires no great strength of argument to produce the belief of its truth. These sentiments continued with augmented efficacy during the reigns of Charles and of James: and it may be seen from the famous Oxford decree, in the year one thousand six hundred and eighty-three, what were the favourite maxims of the leading men in the university.

When the divine mercy sent the prince of Orange to deliver the nation from popery and slavery, a considerable number of the clergy had imbibed so much of the essence of both, that they were unable to accommodate themselves to the new order of things. Several of the episcopal bench with the metropolitan at their head, refused to take the oaths to the civil government, and were deposed from their exalted stations: some of the inferior clergy imitated their example and shared their fate. By a far greater number, who held the same opinions, interest was consulted rather than conscience; they kept their comfortable livings, took the oaths, but still retained their former ideas. The proceedings of the lower house of convocation, during the reign of William and Anne, discover a cast of men, who were something between protestants and papists: they had some feathers of the one, and some plucked from the other, with which they decked themselves. Their pretensions to priestly power were beyond any thing which had appeared since the reformation: they had improved even upon Laud, and like those who fancy themselves the peculiar favourites of heaven, they wished to monopolize the benefit to themselves, by excluding every other sect.

The conceit was cherished by a branch of study

which had become exceedingly fashionable, perhaps because it tended to give them high ideas of themselves, namely the reading of the fathers. They were men of lively affections, and said many pious things; but their views both of the doctrines and duties of Christianity, were in general extremely inaccurate; and the idolatrous student of their writings (and that was the character of most of them at this time), was in the greatest danger of being led astray from truth. One thing especially observable in the views of the fathers, and which these men did not fail to observe, and learn, was a most exalted idea of the dignity, power, and privileges of the clergy, accompanied with the bitterest enmity against those who were guilty of schism, which is always represented by them as a damnable sin. Those charged with it were persons who differed from them in sentiments, and would not submit to their dominion, but chose to think and act for themselves.

The effect produced by such a course of study was both powerful and extensive; and the hearts of the high church clergy, jurors as well as non-jurors, were formed in this mould. The low-church party in the establishment, which consisted of men of the most respectable characters, they scarcely considered as partakers of the Christian priesthood. The dissenters from the church of every kind, except the papists, were looked upon by them as having not the shadow of a claim to be churches of Christ, nor their ministers, ministers of Christ. The non-jurors alone, such as Hickeys, Brett, and others, durst bring this charge against their episcopal brethren; but the high party who had taken the oaths, joined with them in denying the validity of the dissenting ministry.

To Henry Dodwell, who out-heroded all those Herods, the palm of victory for advancing claims of sacerdotal dignity must be assigned. Without a rival he was a man of distinguished learning; but without a sound judgment, and just ideas of religion—what does learning avail? It is wealth in the hands of a fool. This was verified in Dodwell, to a degree which must excite astonishment in every reflecting mind. “The human soul, he asserted, was naturally mortal, but received immortality in baptism. But this amazing effect was not produced, unless the minister, who dispensed the ordinance, was episcopally ordained, and could prove the purity of his ordination by a regular succession from the apostles. As the dissenters, and indeed all the presbyterian churches in Europe, could not shew their episcopal genealogy, they were all, both ministers and people, blotted out of the book of the living, and excluded from a future state of existence.” But though few proceeded to so extravagant a height, it was a common sentiment among the high-church clergy, that the ordination of dissenting ministers, as being performed by presbyters, was not valid; that the unhappy man had not passed that deep and wide abyss, which separates a layman from the priesthood; and consequently that all their ministrations were without authority, without influence, and without effect. These positions many learned doctors gravely asserted and maintained; and multitudes of the people, who adhered to them, most cordially believed.

There are sentiments of such a nature, that to state them is to confute them; and it is the case on the present subject. If such claims were now advanced, instead of reasoning we should laugh, and every man of

common understanding would laugh with us ; and if the person who made them was not put to the blush, he would be deemed incorrigible, and we should apply to him the words of God to Ephraim : “ He is joined to idols, let him alone.” But these men were really serious in their charge ; and the dissenters considered it incumbent on them to give a serious answer, and draw up a grave defence.

James Owen, minister of a presbyterian congregation at Shrewsbury, a man of talents, piety, and learning, particularly applied himself to this service. From his pen the press circulated an able vindication of ordination by presbyters as of equal validity with ordination by bishops. It was entitled, “ A Plea for Scripture Ordination.” After his decease, Charles Owen, his brother, prosecuted the subject. He published “ a Vindication of the Plea,” “ a Treatise on the superiority of Ordination by Presbyters to that of Bishops,” and a History of Ordination,” which had all been begun by his brother James, and were completed by him ; and in them he notices and exposes the arguments of Mr. Gipps, rector of Bury, in Lancashire, who had written against James Owen’s Plea for Presbyterian Ordination.

In supporting the cause of the dissenters, James Owen, in his Plea, insists that presbyters are the only bishops whom the Scripture describes. Paul and Barnabas were, he says, ordained by presbyters. They have power to ordain, because they have power to preach and baptize, and to dispense the Lord’s supper, which the New Testament represents as more important parts of the pastoral office. In the greater part of the reformed churches, ordination is by presbyters : if it be invalid they are all un-

churched. Their ordination is better than that of the church of Rome, which, though accompanied with much superstition, and performed by men who grievously corrupt the doctrines of Christ, is accounted valid by the church of England. Presbyterian ordination was acknowledged by the old church of England before the days of Laud. There are instances of ordination by presbyters in the primitive church. At Alexandria, it was the custom for the presbyters to ordain their own bishops. These and various other topics are enlarged on with a considerable portion of argument, authority, and learning; and the dissenters had no reason to complain of their advocate, nor be ashamed of his labours.

But perhaps a fair examination of the subject may most effectually settle the dispute. Let the first inquiry be, what ordination is. We cannot find any stress laid upon it in the New Testament, nor is it spoken of in such a way as that we should consider persons greater than ordinary as necessary to confer it. Indeed, if our ideas on the subject be formed from the sacred Scriptures, a large measure of the importance ascribed to it will be removed, and the mystic power supposed to be conveyed by it will vanish. The character of a good minister of Christ is delineated in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. The person who possesses this character is qualified for the office; and if he earnestly desires it, he desires a good work, to which it is proper that he should devote himself. If a church of Christ should find him apt to teach, approve of his good conversation in Christ, and invite him to be their pastor; and if he, on due consideration, accepts their invitation to the

pastoral office among them, a relation is formed in consequence of their mutual choice. The church has chosen him for their pastor, and promised to be subject to him in the Lord; and he has solemnly engaged to take the oversight of them, and to watch for their souls, as one that must give an account. Every thing essential is performed.

But it is proper that he should be set apart to the office with becoming solemnity. Of this the primitive church furnishes a suitable pattern; for we find that it was customary to set apart ministers to the pastoral office by prayer, and the imposition of hands as an ordinary practice, for it was observed in instances where there were no gifts to be conferred, Acts xiii. 1, 2, 3. We shall scarcely be supposed to err, if we add, that, in the service, the duties of the minister to the people were enforced with earnestness and affection, and the duties of the people to their minister explained and pressed home upon their consciences. That this should be done by ministers, is in the highest degree proper; and the New Testament gives not the shadow of a hint of its even being performed by any besides.

As Christ has appointed communion among his churches and ministers, there is a peculiar fitness that the service should be performed by the pastors of the neighbouring churches, who, by this act, proclaim their union and brotherly love. By engaging in the work they publicly express their approbation of the conduct, both of the minister and of the church. They solemnly declare, that they consider the person whom they ordain, to be qualified for the work of the ministry; the conduct of the church in choosing him for their pastor to be worthy of a

Christian society; and his acceptance of the pastoral office among them to be agreeable to the great Head of the church. Such is the declaration which they make when they lay their hands upon his head, and implore the divine blessing upon him, and upon his flock, and inculcate the duties arising out of the relation into which they have entered.

Thus far will the Scripture support us in our ideas of ordination. There is nothing here but what accords with its simple and venerable institutions; nothing but what reason must approve as agreeable to the common sense and general sentiments of mankind; nothing but what harmonizes with the genius of the Gospel, which regards its ministers, not as wonder-working mystagogues, but as teachers of those glorious truths by which men are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. If this is ordination, and the whole of ordination, then there are no peculiar powers requisite in him who confers it, nor is it necessary that he should be a person of the highest dignity: ordinary pastors will do just as well; for parade, and pomp, and splendor, and sounding names and titles, have neither place nor weight in the church of Jesus Christ.

But the ideas which many have formed of ordination are more extensive and more exalted. The thin remains of the old English presbyterians, during this period, went a little farther, but rather more in words than in reality. The Scotch presbyterians carry the matter to a still greater height, but our business is with the church of England, whose bishops profess

that they alone have the right and power of **ordination**, and that they **communicate to the priest ordained, authority to exercise the office** of a minister of **the Gospel** by means of the laying on of their hands, and by their prayers. The person was before a layman, he is now a clergyman; and has received a new character and new powers, **by means of his ordination.**

However **plausible** these pretensions may be, many objections may be brought against them. A diocesan bishop, it may be pleaded, is a being unknown to the Scriptures of the New Testament, and unknown to the purest antiquity. And shall this unknown being possess the whole power of admitting ministers into the church of Christ? Shall they, in this respect, have the keys of the kingdom of the Redeemer, so that they shall open, and no man can shut; and shall shut, and no man can open? The authority pleaded for such a power should be very express. But if instead of this there be not a word in the Scripture to countenance and support it, the foundation is built on air.

Should it be allowed that diocesan bishops possess the right of ordination, it may be enquired, what does the person ordained receive from them? Perhaps it may be said, a layman is converted into a clergyman; he acquires a different character from what he had before; and he becomes capable of holding any preferment in the church of England, to which he may be introduced by his interest, or his merit. But this is merely a political regulation deriving its authority and efficacy from a statute of the king, and the lords and commons in parliament assembled. Rise from ecclesiastical to divine authority, and all this harlequinade vanishes from the sight. Instead of magic ceremonies, which change the character, and make a person

a different being from what he was before, we perceive only the unassuming pastors of the churches rejoicing on the entrance of a man of God into the Christian ministry, reminding him of the duties of his office, and imploring the blessing of God to rest upon him.

If this will not satisfy, but it is still insisted on, that the bishop conveys office power, and authority, to the person whom he ordains, and hereby makes him a minister of Christ, let the following question be answered. Can a bishop, by imposition of hands, and uttering his form of words, make an ignorant man wise, or an irreligious man holy, or a mere man of the world a man of God? In these respects, the person remains the same as he was before. What then is the extent of the bishop's power? He may make him a clergyman of the church of England; but he does not, and cannot make him a minister of Jesus Christ. The Head of the church has described their character, and specified the qualifications which they must possess. If a person destitute of these qualifications applies for ordination, all the bishops on earth cannot make the man a minister of Christ, or convey to him what is called office power, and authority. The man is, in the eyes of Christ, a hireling, a thief, and robber; he may be any thing but a minister of Christ—that he cannot be. An ignorant creature, a man of the world, an irreligious person is not, and can never be a minister of Christ by the imposition of all the hands of all the bishops that ever lived. The pretensions of the church of Rome to convey, by the imposition of their prelates' hands, an indelible character, which an apostasy into mahometanism, or deism, or even atheism, nay,

which death, and hell, and heaven cannot destroy, are more calculated to make infidels than ministers of Christ¹. That any protestant church should ever have made the remotest approaches to such a spirit, is justly a subject of lamentation. Christianity suffers by the folly ; and infidels are hardened in their unbelief.

The claim of an uninterrupted succession from the apostles, which was at this time strenuously urged by the high-church party, as the ground of their exclusive right of conferring ordination, is perhaps one of the weakest and most ridiculous which was ever made². When such a pretence is set up by the church

¹ Campbell's Ecclesiastical History.

² Again ; either the church of Rome is an heretical church or not. If she be, it follows again, that she has no lawful ministry, nor a power to transmit it to others. If not, there follows a train of the most destructive consequences to all the reformed churches. For if she be not an heretical church, then her whole faith is orthodox ; and it follows, that the pope's supremacy, the churches infallibility, transubstantiation, the sacrifice of the mass, the lawfulness of communion in one kind, of invoking the saints, and honouring their religious images and pictures, and many more articles denied by the reformed churches, are all articles of revealed faith, because they are all proposed as such by the church of Rome : and if any of them were not revealed truths, she would be manifestly guilty of heresy ; because to add to the revealed word of God, is as much heresy as to detract from it : that is to say, in plainer terms, whatever church declares that to be an article of revealed faith which really is not so, is no less an heretical church than that which denies articles of faith revealed by God.

Well, then, supposing the church of Rome not to be an heretical church, it follows, 1, That she is the true church of Christ. 2. That all the reformed churches have separated themselves from the true church of Christ. 3. That in so doing, they are all schismatical churches. 4. That they are likewise heretical churches in denying the forementioned articles, proposed by her as revealed truths. And, 5, That being heretical churches, they are incapable

of Rome, it is with a better grace as to the reality of it, and it is more of a piece with the superstitious absurdities of her abominable system. But for a protestant to plead in its behalf may justly cover him with shame, and make his mother church blush for the folly of her son. What priest in the world can prove that he has derived his ordination from the line of this interrupted succession? Credulity herself must dwell in the bosom of him who entertains such a thought. But making the impossible supposition that a person did prove that his ordination may be traced in legal succession to St. Peter, and that a certain virtue flowed from hand to hand, what does he gain? Can the virtue received from the hands of a pope Joan, or (if the existence of such a personage be denied) from the whoremongers, adulterers, murderers, sodomites, infidels, and atheists (for such even Romish writers assert some of the popes to have been) communicate any thing that is good? If it is conceived that any influence was actually communicated, it must be of so deleterious a quality, that a person of a pure mind who had viewed the channel through which it ran, on seeing the lawn sleeves lifted up to confer ordination, would cry out in terror, "keep off your filthy hands from me: the head of Judas Iscariot would be polluted by their of having any lawful ministry, because no man, or society of men, ever had a lawful power to preach heresy. This I call a train of of consequences, destructive to all the reformed churches, if the church of Rome be not an heretical church; and if she be one, they can have no lawful mission from her: and so they are hemmed in betwixt the two horns of this dilemma, one of which must give them a mortal wound, let them turn themselves what way they please." The Touchstone of the new Religion, &c.

touch'." Besides, do the Scriptures teach men to place any dependence on such a thing? Does the genius of Christianity countenance the claim? Nay, does it not with a voice of thunder condemn it as a contemptible superstition, directly opposed to both the letter and spirit of the Gospel?

If from these giddy heights, to which high church fanaticism soars, we descend to the sober vale of common sense, and peruse the New Testament with serious attention, astonishment must fill the soul to perceive that so great importance has been attached to episcopal ordination; and by many of these zealots so little to the spiritual qualifications of the person, on which the word of God lays the whole stress.

In addition to this reasoning, if it be considered that the person ordained by presbyters manifests as much of the spirit of a Christian minister as he who has received the imposition of his grace of Canterbury's hands; that the most evident marks of divine approbation accompany his labours in the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of the disciples of Christ; and that the kingdom of Christ in all its interests is as effectually promoted by him, we shall be in no danger of drawing a wrong conclu-

¹ If the French protestants had set any value on an ordination from men who professed to have derived their powers in a regular line of succession from the apostles, they had the noblest opportunities of receiving it with peculiar splendour. Not only bishops but cardinals came over from Rome to the reformed religion: but so far were they from considering it as an honour, that they accounted it contamination; and when one of the converted bishops wished to officiate as a presbyterian minister, looking upon his popish orders as a nullity, he requested to be, and was ordained anew by the elders of the reformed church.

sion if we infer, that ordination by pastors of congregational churches is at least to the full as valid as that which is conferred by diocesan bishops, who profess to be able to trace their spiritual pedigree up to St. Peter, or St. Paul^m.

^m This subject is ably treated in Pierce's Sermons, p. 1.

END OF VOL. 1.



